

Torah for Its Own Sake: The Decalogue in Rabbinic and Patristic Exegesis

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Abstract

One of the enduring legacies supersessionism has imparted to Christianity in general, and evangelical Christianity in particular, is a complicated relationship with the legal material of the Hebrew Bible. There is a common belief that since Christians follow the New Covenant, these laws are deemed null or fulfilled by Christ, and therefore do not require attention, or at least not the same level one would grant other biblical texts. The issue with this belief is that the legal material is part of the Christian canon, and therefore—doctrinally speaking—deserves *serious* attention.

In seeking a robust and enduring reason to engage the legal material, I propose that evangelicals adopt a rabbinic concept that interrogates and develops one's disposition toward Torah. This rabbinic concept is תורה לשמה (*Torah lishmah*), or “Torah for its own sake.” In this rabbinic understanding, when one studies Torah, one should study it *lishmah*, “for its own sake”—and no other. I argue that *Torah lishmah* for a Christian can mean to study Torah—especially the legal material—not simply because it might be personally or communally beneficial, but because it is *divine teaching*, because it is given to be studied and known intimately in all its detail, in both its theological *and* embodied aspects, because studying it is an act of lovingkindness toward God, a giving of oneself out of love and loyalty.

How do evangelicals learn how to adopt *Torah lishmah*? I suggest that we have the rabbis to guide us: a vast array of texts from late antiquity onward, documenting the attempts of numerous rabbis to engage *Torah lishmah*. I propose that we read these texts alongside our own biblical commentaries, so that we might learn what *Torah lishmah* is and how it might positively affect our approach to the legal material.

To begin this process and to help illustrate my proposal, I start at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Words—that is, the Decalogue, as it appears in Exod 20:2-17. The rabbinic midrashic commentary I use to engage the Decalogue is known as the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael*, a tannaitic *halakhic* commentary on the Book of Exodus. To help contextualize and ground my explication, I compare the *Mekhilta*’s interpretations with those of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), one of the most influential theologians and exegetes among the Church Fathers, and certainly one of the most important progenitors of evangelical Christianity. Together, the *Mekhilta* and Augustine’s interpretations are then brought into conversation with contemporary evangelical commentaries on the Decalogue. I compare especially each genre’s presuppositions, contexts, interests, insights, and methods. Through these comparisons, I underscore key insights Christians might learn from the rabbinic interpretations. Most importantly, through these comparisons, I determine the meaning and significance of *Torah lishmah* for an evangelical.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANE Ancient Near East
b. Babylonian Talmud
m. Mishnah
RIS School of R. Ishmael
t. Tosefta
y. Yerushalmi

Bible

Gen Genesis
Exod Exodus
Lev Leviticus
Num Numbers
Deut Deuteronomy
Josh Joshua
Judg Judges
Ruth Ruth
1 Sam 1 Samuel
2 Sam 2 Samuel
1 Kgs 2 Kings
2 Kgs 2 Kings
1 Chr 1 Chronicles
2 Chr 2 Chronicles
Ezra Ezra
Neh Nehemiah
Esth Esther
Job Job
Ps/Pss Psalm
Prov Proverb
Eccl Ecclesiastes
Song Song of Solomon
Isa Isaiah
Jer Jeremiah
Lam Lamentations
Ezek Ezekiel
Dan Daniel
Hos Hosea
Joel Joel
Amos Amos
Obad Obadiah
Jonah Jonah

Mic Micah
Nah Nahum
Hab Habakkuk
Zeph Zephaniah
Hag Haggai
Zech Zechariah
Mal Malachi
Matt Matthew
Mark Mark
Luke Luke
John John
Acts Acts
Rom Romans
1 Cor 1 Corinthians
2 Cor 2 Corinthians
Gal Galatians
Eph Ephesians
Phil Philippians
Col Colossians
1 Thess 1 Thessalonians
2 Thess 2 Thessalonians
1 Tim 1 Timothy
2 Tim 2 Timothy
Titus Titus
Phlm Philemon
Heb Hebrews
Jas James
1 Pet 1 Peter
2 Pet 2 Peter
1 John 1 John
2 John 2 John
3 John 3 John
Jude Jude
Rev Revelation

Apocrypha

Bar Baruch
Jdt Judith
1 Macc 1 Maccabees
2 Macc 2 Maccabees

Sir	Sirach
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

Augustine

<i>c. Adim.</i>	<i>contra Adimantum</i>
<i>civ.</i>	<i>de civitate dei</i>
<i>cons. ev.</i>	<i>de consensu evangelistarum</i>
<i>div. qu.</i>	<i>de diversis quaestionibus</i>
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>de doctrina christiana</i>
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>enarrationes in Psalmos</i>
<i>ench.</i>	<i>enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate</i>
<i>ep.</i>	<i>epistula</i>
<i>c. ep. pel.</i>	<i>contra duas epistulas pelagianorum</i>
<i>f. et. op.</i>	<i>de fide et operibus</i>
<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>contra Faustum manichaeum</i>
<i>Io. ev. tr.</i>	<i>tractatus in evangelium Iohannis</i>
<i>c. Iul.</i>	<i>contra Iulianum</i>
<i>c. Iul. imp.</i>	<i>opus imperfectum contra Iulianum</i>
<i>qu. hept.</i>	<i>quaestiones in heptateuchum</i>
<i>s.</i>	<i>sermones</i>
<i>spir. et. litt.</i>	<i>de spiritu et littera</i>
<i>trin.</i>	<i>de trinitate</i>

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1.0 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Let it be Your will, O Adonai our God, to establish peace among the heavenly family, the nations of the world, and among the students studying your Torah, whether they do it for its own sake or not. But, let it also be Your will that all who do not study your Torah for its own sake will one day do it for its own sake.

—R. Safr¹

When I first converted to Christianity² during high school, I was presented with a challenge to read the Bible from cover to cover. I remember being enraptured by the creation story, challenged by Abraham's faith in the so-called sacrifice of Isaac scene, inspired by Joseph's resolve in servitude, and riveted by Israel's exodus from Egypt. But then came Sinai, the Book of the Covenant, and not long after, all of the laws spread across Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. On the one hand, I wanted to read through these laws, because I believed they were somehow important. They were, after all, the Word of God. On the other hand, I could find no relevance in them for a life redeemed by grace. Consequently, my excitement for the Bible dissipated, my endurance flagged, and several times I found myself falling asleep while reading a section of the legal material. I returned to the laws again in college, when my Hebrew Bible professor assigned the

¹ B. Berakhot 16b-17a. Translation is my own in consultation with Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., "Perek II," in *Koren Talmud Bavli: Berakhot*, vol. 1, ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2012), 112.

² For many Christians, including the vast majority of evangelicals, conversion means an acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice for one's sins and a dedication of one's life to following Christ. Many believe that baptism is also required, while others believe it is a significant ritual, but not essential for salvation. The church in which I converted held the latter position on baptism.

entire Pentateuch as a reading assignment. The only memory I have was skimming through them as fast as I could. After that, I returned to the laws one more time in seminary. They were part of the readings for an introductory course in Hebrew Bible. I believe that was one of the few assignments I have ever skipped.

I know I am not the only evangelical who has struggled with the legal material of the Pentateuch. In fact, this is a quite common issue. It is no surprise that, in general, evangelicals have had a complicated relationship with the Law. While it is part of the Bible, part of inspired Scripture, finding a reason to engage it can be difficult, to say the least. This complicated relationship—evangelicals and the Law—forms the topic of this dissertation. The basic goal is to discover a more robust and enduring motivation to engage the legal material of the Pentateuch. Drawing on the methods of comparative theology, I will propose that a rabbinic disposition known as *Torah lishmah*, or “Torah for its own sake,” offers a way forward. This disposition will be put to the test through a sustained engagement with a rabbinic midrashic anthology known as the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael*.³ The locus of the test will be Mount Sinai and the giving of the Decalogue, as presented in Exod 20:2-17. Before proceeding any further, however, it will be helpful to define what I mean by evangelicalism, the specific branch within evangelicalism with which I identify, and the presuppositions that I hold.

³ Throughout this dissertation, the *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* will be referred to simply as *Mekhilta*. This is in distinction the *Mekhilta d’Shimon b. Yoḥai*, which will be referred to by its full name.

1.1 EVANGELICALISM DEFINED

The community I come from is, in one sense, notoriously difficult to define, and yet, it is, in another sense, quite predictable. This community is commonly called evangelicalism. In the United States, we hail from diverse regions, from the deep south to the upper midwest, from the east coast to the west, each with its own unique culture and subcultures. We gravitate toward distinct charismatic leaders, such as the southern conservative⁴ Jerry Falwell, the mega church, purpose-driven Rick Warren,⁵ the northern urbanite Timothy Keller, the social justice progressive⁶ Jim Wallis. We identify across the denominational spectrum, including Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and even Catholics. Many, though, identify with no denomination at all.⁷ We have varying forms of intellectual commitments, which can be identified by the higher education institutions with which we affiliate or the scholars that reside therein:

⁴ The term “conservatism” in an American evangelical context is often in reference to one’s theological, social, political, and economic positions. For example, if asked how one might gain access to eternal life, a conservative evangelical answer would likely be that eternal life is heaven (i.e., life with God and God’s people), and that one cannot gain entrance by one’s merits, but through explicit knowledge and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If asked whether abortion is ever a possibility, an answer would be in the negative, except possibly in the case of rape or incest. If asked which political party a Christian should support, an answer would likely be the Republican Party. If asked whether the government should have a larger role in feeding the hungry, an answer would likely be that attending to the poor is the primary occupation of non-governmental volunteers, most especially God’s people.

⁵ Rick Warren wrote a book in 2002, published by Zondervan, called *The Purpose Driven Life*. Within five years of its release, the book sold over thirty million copies. In the book, Warren describes that for which all humanity yearns but is often prevented from obtaining because of worldly distractions: to accept God’s love and to be transformed to help spread that love to the world.

⁶ Progressive, or liberal, might be seen as on the opposite end of the spectrum from conservative in terms of theological, social, political, and economic positions. In contrast to a conservative, a progressive might argue that explicit knowledge or a relationship with Christ is not necessary for salvation, that there are instances in which abortion is acceptable beyond rape or incest, that the Democratic Party is able to and actually does God’s work (though not all the time), and that charity alone will not solve hunger—the structure of society itself must be changed, and that requires the intervention of the government.

⁷ This group is often identified as “nondenominational.”

the conservative Liberty University in Virginia, the moderate⁸ Fuller Theological Seminary in southern California, the progressive United Theological Seminary in Ohio.

At the same time, there are, as I noted, predictable tendencies that bind evangelicals together. D. W. Bebbington once described four traits of an evangelical that I find helpful: (1) conversionism, or the need to be fundamentally changed from an old sinful self to a new Christ-like self; (2) activism, or the desire to spread the gospel of Christ's life-changing power to others; (3) biblicism, or the belief that the Bible must be foundational to all doctrine and practice; and (4) crucicentrism, or the view that Jesus' death and resurrection are the mechanisms for atonement and salvation.⁹

Amidst this diversity, if I were to locate the particular group with which I identify, I would do that by underscoring certain influential theologians and schools that evangelicals similar to me would view as especially influential: theologians like Karl Barth, Leslie Newbigin, and Stanley Hauerwas; biblical scholars like John Goldingay, N. T. Wright, and Brevard Childs; schools like Fuller Theological Seminary, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Duke Divinity School. A term that might encapsulate this community is "moderate evangelical": a group that values intellectual commitments—Jesus Christ as savior, the Bible as inerrant in what it teaches, etc.—but is open to new

⁸ If conservative and progressive occupy opposite ends of the spectrum, then moderate lies somewhere in between, often beginning from a conservative position, but willing to both listen to alternative views and be changed by them. I explain this more below.

⁹ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1-19. These are general traits, and depending on how conservative or progressive one might be, there is flexibility in one's position on these matters. One might reject one of these traits but hold the other three and still be counted by at least some (within evangelicalism) as evangelical. What makes the determination of "evangelical" particularly difficult is not only the possible discrepancy between an outsider and insider's evaluation, but the reality that there is no final arbiter within evangelicalism to declare any given person's status.

ideas, new challenges, new modes of thought. While these last may seep in slowly after long consideration, they tend to become integral to one's theology and practice.

1.2 THEOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS

At the outset, I would like to make clear that in this dissertation, I presuppose a non-supersessionist stance toward Judaism. Mary Boys, a prominent scholar in Jewish-Christian relations, defines supersessionism as holding (1) that because Jews have rejected Jesus, Christianity has “replaced” Judaism as the sole religion in covenant with God; (2) as a result, God's covenant with Judaism has ended.¹⁰ In contrast, a *non-supersessionist* position affirms that God and the Jewish people still maintain an active, life-giving, collaborative, and salvific covenant.¹¹ While supersessionism remains a subject of concern and debate within significant sectors of the broader Christian world, this debate is not the concern of this dissertation. My interest is exploring the next steps *after* a Christian has adopted a non-supersessionist position.

Nevertheless, I will mention some of the influences behind the position I have adopted. Over the last fifty years, there has been a crescendo of powerful voices in Christianity that have critiqued and sought alternatives to supersessionism. When reconsidering Christianity's relationship to Judaism, it is nearly impossible, even for an evangelical, to ignore the groundbreaking text by the Catholic Church at the Second

¹⁰ Mary C. Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing? Judaism as a Source of Christian Self-Understanding* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2000), 10-11.

¹¹ There is another approach, known as fulfillment theology, in which Christ brings to completion what was promised in the Old Covenant with Israel. This position, however, has problems of its own. See footnote 13.

Vatican Council in 1965, *Nostra Aetate*, and its stunning words: “Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.”¹² As *Nostra Aetate* states, quoting Paul, “theirs [Israel’s] is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh (Rom. 9:4-5).” From this, the document affirms that God “does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle [Paul].” The logic underlying this argument seems to be that if it were in fact the case that God did repent or retract God’s own promises, what would this say about God? What might it say about the supposed secure relationship that Christians enjoy with God? How much trust can be instilled in a God who reneges on promises?¹³

It should also be noted that *Nostra Aetate*, while beginning to clarify a number of issues related to supersessionism, also opened many other questions. In particular, after reading *Nostra Aetate*, one might wonder whether the language of “new people of God” might mean that “new” replaces the “old” (i.e., the Jewish people). If that is what *Nostra*

¹² Vatican Council II, *Nostra Aetate* [Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions], http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed July 16, 2019), no. 4.

¹³ There is a proposal, developed by theologians like Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger in the decades after *Nostra Aetate*, known as fulfillment theology. In this view, God does not renege or replace God’s covenant with Israel. Rather, God brings to completion in a New Covenant the truth and promises that were given to Israel in the first covenant. As scholars such as Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt have pointed out, fulfillment theology seeks to preserve the enduring necessity of God’s covenant with Israel, arguing there is truth and value in this covenant, but it ultimately fails in its task. By stating that the New Covenant completes the Old Covenant, fulfillment theology casts the *continued* relevance or existence of Israel’s covenant with God in doubt. What need is there for an Old Covenant (and a religion that follows it), if a New Covenant has been established? It would seem, then, that fulfillment theology actually advocates a form of replacement theology, a view that the New Covenant takes the place of the Old Covenant. Understood in this way, fulfillment theology does not appear to capture the theology or spirit of *Nostra Aetate*. See Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, “Israel and the Church: Fulfillment Beyond Supersessionism?” in *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Walpole: Peeters, 2010), 159-183. See also Joseph Ratzinger, *Many Religions—One Covenant: Israel, the Church, and the World* (San Francisco: Ignatian Press, 1999).

Aetate intends, then the document promotes supersessionism. Fortunately, this question was answered in the Catholic Church's most recent 2015 document, produced by the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of "Nostra Aetate" (No.4)."¹⁴ The document stresses, "The Church is the new people of God (cf. "Nostra Aetate," No. 4) but not in the sense that the people of God of Israel has ceased to exist... the Church does not replace the people of God of Israel."¹⁵ The document then goes on to state, "That the Jews are participants in God's salvation is theologically unquestionable, but how that can be possible without confessing Christ explicitly, is and remains an unfathomable divine mystery."¹⁶

The Catholic Church's profound and substantial statements over the last fifty years about Judaism provide Protestants useful language and concepts from which to construct their own positions.¹⁷ But Protestants are not entirely bereft of their own heritage. Protestant re-understandings of Christian-Jewish relations can be traced at least to Karl Barth. Some argue that Barth might even have influenced Catholic re-

¹⁴ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable (Rom 11:29): A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of "Nostra Aetate" (No.4)," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed July 16, 2019).

¹⁵ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, no. 23.

¹⁶ Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, no. 36.

¹⁷ For an example of how evangelicals have found *Nostra Aetate* influential, see Marvin R. Wilson, "An Evangelical Perspective on Judaism," in *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation on Scripture, Theology, and History*, eds. Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson, and A. James Rudin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 12. While attempting to adopt a theological space for Judaism in God's eschatological plan, Wilson, in his exegesis of Romans 11, also cites Cardinal Bea and *Nostra Aetate* as helpful interlocutors for his thesis.

understandings.¹⁸ It appears Barth may have been the first to interpret Romans 9-11 to mean that Jews still have an enduring covenant with God. Barth's *Church Dogmatics* II/2 contains an exegesis of Romans 9-11, in which Barth concludes that a Christian cannot help but affirm Israel's continued mission in the world, a mission that springs from the same God who has issued Christianity's mission and has revoked no promise or covenant with either.¹⁹

1.3 THE PROBLEM: TORAH, LAWS, PENTATEUCH

In addition to the two tenets of supersessionism that are described above, Boys names a third. This one deals with the very issue that this dissertation centers on: the Christian claim that the New Testament (NT) has replaced or has improved upon and brought to completion what was undeveloped or lacking in the Old Testament (OT).²⁰ In contrast, a *non-supersessionist* holds that the NT is *a* legitimate interpretation of the OT,

¹⁸ See Thomas Stransky's response as part of "Forum Essay," a review of John Connelly's *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews*, in *The Catholic Historical Review* 98:4 (October 2012): 758-60.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2.2, secs. 34-35 of *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. W. Bromiley, J. C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, J. L. M. Haire, and R. A. Stewart, eds. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 1-110.

Barth's complicated position is not without acute issues. For example, according to Barth, Israel's rejection of Christ was divinely-ordained, and it is through this rejection that Israel continues its mission. This claim has the undeniable marks of condescension, even though it offers a unique place for Israel to exist. Moreover, one might find uncomfortable Barth's view that Israel and Christianity are both rooted in Christ, whether the former knows it or not, and his eschatological vision that at the eschaton—and the eschaton alone—Israel will accept Christ. For Barth, this is how *all* Israel will be saved. See Angus Paddison, "Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of Romans 9-11 in Light of Jewish-Christian Understanding," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28:4 (2006): 469-488 and R. Kendall Soulen, "Karl Barth and the Future of the God of Israel," *Pro Ecclesia* 6:4 (Fall 1997): 413-428. But both Barth's promising proposals and his tenuous conclusions have given some theologians and exegetes after him the space and materials to construct more coherent positions. For example, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1996).

²⁰ Boys, 11.

but not the only one, and that the OT has enduring coherence and meaning, both in relation to and independent of the NT. Other legitimate interpretations might, for example, be found in rabbinic Judaism.²¹

Whether or not evangelicals hold a non-supersessionist position toward Jews and Judaism, they may wittingly or unwittingly find themselves applying supersessionist understandings to the OT. The prominent evangelical OT scholar, John Goldingay, describes this problem in a remark about his students: the typical student at the beginning of the semester, he says, usually possesses three beliefs about the OT: first, the OT is the “Word of God”; second, it is inspired; and third, it is inerrant.²² These positions may seem obvious to many evangelicals, and are indeed non-supersessionist. But in the course of giving further explanation, these same students tend to describe the OT in terms that emit the distinct odor of Marcionism: the God of the Old Testament is violent; this God vigorously pursues vengeance; this God is not a comforter or intimate or agapic, but distant, cold, and legalistic. These descriptions, according to these students, differ sharply with Jesus, who evokes God’s peace, God’s love, and God’s mercy.²³ Jesus is the one who welcomes little children, responds to violence with the cross, offers grace instead of the Law.

²¹ Both Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, in this light, would be seen as two responses to the loss of the Second Temple, among other factors. See Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, nos. 29-31. See also Pontifical Biblical Commission, “*The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*,” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20020212_polo-ebraico_en.html (accessed July 17, 2019), no. 22.

²² Goldingay’s article is based on a lecture that he delivered when he became the David Allan Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in 1999. Based on Goldingay’s career, the students he refers to may have come from his previous teaching post, St. John’s College, Nottingham, in addition to other contexts. As his article is addressed to mostly evangelical seminary students at Fuller, his description of his experiences are most likely based on his experience with teaching evangelicals.

²³ John Goldingay, “What are the Characteristics of Evangelical Study of the Old Testament?,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 73:2 (2001): 99-102.

Goldingay's students, I think, represent very well a strong tendency among evangelicals. Many undeniably affirm the full canonicity of the Old Testament.²⁴ And yet, many focus most of their attention on the NT, as it is perceived to contain the primary, if not the only, narratives, theologies, and practices that define a Christian life. This often leads to several ways that these evangelicals relate to the OT. Some find the OT inaccessible: much of it is confusing, cumbersome, irrelevant, or even unpalatable. In particular, with regard to the legal material of the OT, there is a belief among many that since Christians follow the New Covenant, and since the laws are part of the Mosaic Covenant, these laws are not applicable to Christians and therefore do not require attention—or at least not the same level of attention one would grant those biblical texts that are binding on Christians.²⁵ Others believe they have a firm understanding of the best way to approach the OT. Since the OT is the groundwork or background for the NT, one can better understand aspects of the NT by studying the OT. Still others are unsure about the proper way to engage the OT as fully canonical, inerrant, and inspired, while still affirming the gospel as somehow unique.

Evangelical OT scholars have offered a variety of reasons why more comprehensive attention and greater understanding and appreciation of the OT is not only warranted, but necessary. Foremost, if indeed the *entire Bible is* the “Word of God,” one would do well to give heed to *all* of it, especially the first three quarters. Jesus himself in

²⁴ The most common argument is that the Bible Jesus and the apostles understood as canonical and authoritative should be the Bible that all Christians affirm as canonical and authoritative, and this Bible that Jesus and the apostles accepted is composed of the thirty-nine books evangelicals call the Old Testament. For a brief discussion of the development of the canon, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Rubert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and updated (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 103-116.

²⁵ See Thomas Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christian and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 67.

Matt 5:17-18 lends legitimacy to this view when he says, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.”²⁶ One prominent evangelical OT scholar, Marvin Wilson, argues that those who believe the OT should be studied because it provides background information for the NT end up creating a serious problem. The NT becomes the criterion for selecting relevant passages of the OT. As a result, large sections of the OT are usually ignored in one’s study. If one takes the entire OT to be the Word of God, then disengagement with any part of the OT is not a real possibility.²⁷ Scholars like Goldingay also argue that deeper study of the OT can destabilize certain prejudices: one finds that God actually possesses great love and concern for Israel and the world, the same love and concern that God exhibits in the NT. The NT, then, is not a simple fulfillment of the OT; it is a “continuation of the Old Testament story.”²⁸ Equally important, the OT offers a robust theology, and through its cast of men and women, it underscores attributes of a holy life.²⁹

One can more or less quickly agree with these arguments when one turns to the creation narratives, OT “heroes” like David and Ruth, historical accounts, the Psalms, wisdom literature, or the prophets. But difficulty begins to surface when one encounters the legal material found in most of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Questions immediately arise surrounding the reason to engage these texts. For example,

²⁶ By “law” and “prophets,” Jesus seems to mean the Hebrew Bible (i.e., OT). See Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22 of The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 103.

²⁷ Marvin Wilson, *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 26-28.

²⁸ Goldingay, “Characteristics,” 101-102.

²⁹ Goldingay, “Characteristics,” 100-103.

is reading them necessary? How do they relate to Christian practice? To Christian beliefs? Evangelical OT scholars *have* given answers: the legal material can help determine the content and character of a just society.³⁰ It can help construct a more nuanced theology and assist Christians in discerning specific ways of enacting the two great commandments, love of God and neighbor.³¹ Its moral laws are still incumbent on Christians.³² It can even expose one's inability to observe the commandments perfectly, thereby reminding one of the necessity of grace.³³

These are all sound answers, offering promising solutions to a problem that has vexed evangelicals—save for one issue. That issue has to do with relevance. There is a strong motivation among American evangelicals to weigh the value or necessity of a text, practice, or theology by its utility.³⁴ What is its application? How useful is it? Will it

³⁰ See Goldingay, "Characteristics," 103.

³¹ See Wilson, *Hebraic Heritage*, 54-55. See also David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 34:3 (September 1991): 321-334. Dorsey argues that "legally, none of the 613 stipulations of the Sinaitic covenant are binding for Christians, including the so-called moral laws, while in a revelatory and pedagogical sense all 613 are binding upon us, including all the ceremonial and civic laws" (325). What Dorsey means is that on the one hand, the Old Covenant was abolished and therefore its laws are no longer binding. On the other hand, the laws originate from the same God of the NT, and since this God is unchanging, these laws still have something to teach about God. Thus, if one examines each law closely, determining its theological significance, one not only learns more about who God is, but also what God desires of us (331-334). This is an extremely important point; however, its move toward theologizing and abstraction seem to neglect the concrete, embodied aspects of the laws, which are very much part of them as well. One wonders if in this proposal, one would be influenced to deemphasize or ignore the concrete aspects of the laws. I discuss this more in detail below.

³² See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 177-199. Kaiser defines the moral law as the Decalogue and the Holiness Code of Leviticus 18-19 (198). He offers a compelling argument for why the moral law is still incumbent on Christians. He then argues, "The moral law of God took precedence over the civil and ceremonial laws in that it was based on the character of God. The civil and ceremonial laws functioned only as further illustrations of the moral law" (190). The ceremonial laws are no longer incumbent, because Christ fulfilled them (195). The moral laws function as the "absolute norms against which all other commands in God's law are judged, interpreted, and applied to today" (198). So, while the moral laws of the Mosaic Law are authoritative, the civil and ceremonial laws play a subordinate role.

³³ See Schreiner, 84, 86, and 228.

³⁴ As one text on evangelical biblical interpretation puts it, "for the practicing Christian, the process begun with interpretation is incomplete if it stops at the level of meaning. One must then ask how the text applies to life." See Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, 477.

make a difference in one's life? One can detect this criterion as an undercurrent in the arguments for the study of the OT legal material I mentioned above. Studying OT legal material is useful because it can sharpen one's understanding of God, hone one's ability to love or act morally, put one in one's place. These are extremely important. However, I question the ways in which the search for utility governs one's encounter with the legal material. To what extent does it mitigate seriousness or urgency or openness to certain texts? To what extent does it dissuade attention to some texts altogether? To what extent does it make abstract the concrete, losing the embodied dimensions of the laws, in order to gain the theology or so-called "spirit of the Law"?³⁵ Moreover, I wonder if this approach reduces the Word of God from its value as just that—the Word of God, an invaluable gift in its entirety³⁶—and scales its worth by its perceived utility.

To provide an example, many evangelicals would agree the Decalogue should be studied, as it outlines concisely how to love God and neighbors. But for those evangelicals who do not practice the Sabbath, the Sabbath commandment³⁷—despite being the longest in the Decalogue—may receive less focus than the other nine. To provide another example, the *lex talionis*³⁸ may receive significant consideration, partly because it discusses issues that still concern us today, such as determining just restitution

³⁵ Kaiser seems to be doing a variation on this by placing the moral laws over the ceremonial laws. Whether Kaiser is correct about the moral laws as incumbent on Christians is not the focus of this paper. My goal, as will be seen more fully below, is not to argue which laws Christians should practice. While Kaiser's proposal is very promising, it raises two issues. First, I wonder to what extent the so-called ceremonial laws can be said to be illustrations of the moral law. For example, it is not clear to me how the prohibition of mixing wool and linen in Deut 22:11 illustrates a moral law. Second, from a rabbinic perspective, while moral laws deal with human relations, ceremonial laws deal with human relations with God (though, the rabbis do not use these terms). If one takes this division seriously, much would be lost if one interprets the ceremonial laws as illustrations of the moral laws. Allowing moral and ceremonial laws to stand together but also independently would provide space for more comprehensive understandings of each.

³⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 9:8-10.

³⁷ Exod 20:18 and Deut 5:12-15.

³⁸ Law of retaliation in Exod 21:22-24, Lev 24:19-21, Dt 19:16-21.

for harm to another individual, and partly because Jesus discusses it in Matt 5:38-42. However, by comparison, slavery laws³⁹ may receive far less attention, since slavery is no longer an institution in our society and is understood to be immoral. To provide one last example, the agricultural laws of Lev 19:9-10 may be seen as particularly important, as they discuss the marginalized in society and how to treat them. However, by comparison, the laws surrounding the guilt offering in Lev 5:5-13 may receive less examination, since it is not levitical guilt offerings but Christ's sacrifice that now achieves forgiveness of all sins.

1.4 COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY AS A MEANS TO A SOLUTION

I would like to propose an additional motivation for studying biblical laws—through the discipline of comparative theology—one that does not stand in contradiction to these proposals, but is intimately related to them. Comparative theology (CT), in the words of Catherine Cornille, “involves comparing theologies from a normative standpoint and/or with a normative goal.”⁴⁰ It is, in short, faith seeking understanding in the presence of the religious other, and “involves a process of engaging in constructive theological reflection with other religions from within the religious framework of a particular religious tradition. This tradition provides the impetus, the theological

³⁹ E.g., Exod 21:2-6.

⁴⁰ Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2019), 11.

questions or problems to be proved, and the guiding norms for discerning truth in other religions.”⁴¹

In the way that I understand comparative theology and have been trained at Boston College, CT moves in two distinct phases: description and construction. The first act is to select a common factor⁴² that brings together a phenomenon in one’s own and another tradition, for which the process of comparison can generate a deeper understanding of both traditions. In this act, the goal is to understand the other tradition *as that tradition understands itself*.⁴³ The second act—the constructive phase—seeks to offer new insights for one’s own tradition, which one has gained through the process of comparison. These insights often include the integration of concepts, practices, or methods from a second tradition, or a fresh way of understanding an aspect of one’s own tradition.⁴⁴ In my case, the common factor is the Law. How I will use this common factor to interact with the Jewish tradition will be discussed in the rest of this introduction. The

⁴¹ Cornille, 18.

⁴² These “common factors” William Paden observes, allow us to narrow our focus and juxtapose material. Otherwise, the data would be too vast to manage. See William Paden, “Elements of a New Comparativism,” in *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Kimberly Patton and Benjamin Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 184, 188.

⁴³ In other words, even though one is committed to a particular religious tradition, one is not seeking to evaluate or describe another tradition from the criteria or perspective of one’s own. As Cornille writes, each religious tradition has “an enduring validity and truth within its own religious context.” See Cornille, 106. One must properly understand another religious tradition before one can discern its meaning for one’s own tradition, or evaluate its truth claims. Of course, the search for “objectivity” is elusive at best. A postmodern comparativist is likely to admit his/her situatedness. Thus, naming one’s situatedness becomes an important declaration, as it admits that any (inevitable) distortion one brings to one’s study of another tradition is the result of one’s inability to fully examine another tradition from a vantage point outside of one’s own tradition. See Kimberly Patton and Benjamin Ray, eds., *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Part of what makes CT possible is the realization of one’s situatedness. See Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing the Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 202-213.

⁴⁴ For further descriptions of comparative theology, see Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 1-23. For examples of comparative theology, see Michelle Voss Roberts, ed., *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); and Francis Clooney and Klaus von Stosch, eds., *How to Do Comparative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

comparative work itself and the construction that will follow will form the body of the dissertation.

1.5 TORAH LISHMAH AS A WAY FORWARD

In seeking a more robust and enduring reason to engage the Law, I would like to offer a rabbinic concept that interrogates and develops the motivation behind one's actions, or that which shapes one's view of the text and that which compels one toward it. This rabbinic concept is תורה לשמה (*Torah lishmah*), or "Torah for its own sake." It is a motivation that the rabbis of late antiquity developed, advocated, discussed, and sometimes even debated. In their understanding, when one studies Torah, one should study it *lishmah*, "for its own sake"—and no other.⁴⁵

If one breaks down the phrase *Torah lishmah* into its parts, one finds that *lishmah* has three components: a preposition, a noun, and a possessive pronoun. The ל can mean "to, toward, for, in reference to, according to." The ה at the end is feminine, its referent being "Torah," which is also feminine. The שם can mean "name, essence, title." Usually, when the ל is connected to שם, the sense is "for the sake of." Hence, "for the sake of itself."

⁴⁵ Wilson does mention *Torah lishmah*, but discusses its possible application for Christians in a way that is distinct from what I will be proposing. He argues that *Torah lishmah* is the "Jewish ideal," in which "one should seek to serve one's master out of delight; not dread; study of Scripture should be out of love and honest devotion, not necessity or compulsion." Wilson then states that for a Christian, an emphasis on love should be balanced with "personal accountability" and knowledge that "faithful service" will receive "divine reward," as is exemplified by the parable of the talents in Matt 25:14-30. See Wilson, *Hebraic Heritage*, 260-261.

The word “Torah” in a basic rabbinic sense means “divine teaching.” But the word also has a wide range of meaning in rabbinic thought: it can refer to the first five books of the Bible, the whole Bible,⁴⁶ the entire oral tradition, as represented in Talmud and midrash, and the further ongoing Jewish conversation about Scripture.⁴⁷ For the rabbis, Torah was present before the creation of the world, and indeed, was creation’s very blueprint.⁴⁸ It forms a person into a full adult,⁴⁹ it fills a person with life,⁵⁰ it is the reason for which one is created—so that one might engage it.⁵¹ It will remain, even into the end of time and be studied alongside none other than God.⁵² These are but a few examples of the multiple understandings of rabbinic views of Torah.

According to Norman Lamm, *Torah lishmah* is about cultivating the proper impetus for studying Torah. Lamm gives three possible ideas of what the motivation might be, which he derives from his comprehensive investigation of late antique, medieval, and early modern sources. The first is a “functional definition,” where “Torah must be studied for the sake of the commandment under consideration.” *Lishmah*, in this instance, means to study a commandment, in order to practice the commandment. Study and implementation are two sides of the same coin that is *lishmah*. The second is a “devotional definition,” where *Torah lishmah* is done, because God has commanded that Torah be studied. One studies Torah, then, because it is an expression of one’s loyalty or love for God. The third is a “cognitive definition,” where one studies Torah “for the sake

⁴⁶ I.e. Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim.

⁴⁷ B. Shabbat 31a.

⁴⁸ *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1.

⁴⁹ B. Avodah Zarah 5b.

⁵⁰ B. Avodah Zarah 19b.

⁵¹ M. Avot 2:8.

⁵² B. Hagigah 14a.

of the Torah itself.”⁵³ In other words, one studies Torah for an “increase in knowledge and understanding.”⁵⁴ Even though these three definitions are distinct, Lamm observes that the sources that he investigates stress that there is some overlap. Most importantly, the “functional definition” is usually understood both as its own definition and also as a subset of the “devotional” and “cognitive” definitions. So, whether one engages in Torah study through love or increase of knowledge, part of what makes either of them *lishmah* is that the person studying intends to practice what has been studied.⁵⁵

Lamm’s investigation of each time period reveals that the meaning of *Torah lishmah* evolves over time. While Lamm’s diachronic approach generates fascinating insights, I would like to focus specifically on the appearance of the phrase in the Yerushalmi and Bavli.⁵⁶ In this period, we see a moderate range of views in the texts that discuss *Torah lishmah*.⁵⁷ Even though the sources that discuss *Torah lishmah* are relatively few, space does not allow for me to analyze every single text here. Instead, I will focus on four representative texts.

⁵³ Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah, Torah for Torah’s Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1989) 190-192.

⁵⁴ Lamm, 232. It is worth noting that in these three definitions, Torah is defined in three different ways. In the functional definition, it is defined as a collection of laws; in the devotional definition, it is a textual category; and in the cognitive definition, Torah transcends text. In addition, the first definition puts emphasis on *lishmah*, the second on both words equally, and the third on *Torah*.

⁵⁵ Lamm, 205.

⁵⁶ The Yerushalmi is also known as the Jerusalem and Palestinian Talmud. The text was assembled in Palestine and has a final redaction date in the first half of the fifth century. The Bavli is otherwise known as the Babylonian Talmud. The text was assembled in Babylonia and has a final redaction date perhaps around the early eighth century; however, there is debate on this matter. For more on both texts, see H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 164-224.

Lamm has done a tremendous job gathering *many* texts to explicate his definitions. However, he also gathers texts that do not specifically mention the word *lishmah*, but that he, nonetheless, believes are related to the topic. While it seems that in a number of cases these texts are in fact related to *Torah lishmah*, my aim is to only look at texts that use the term *lishmah* and investigate what might be said about them.

⁵⁷ This is in comparison to other topics, such as the commandments of Sabbath or idolatry, both of which occupy entire tractates in the rabbinic halakhic tradition. There is no sustained discussion of this concept and its parameters.

1.5.1 First Text: Rava's Functional Definition

A pearl of wisdom of Rava: The purpose of wisdom is repentance and good deeds. [For example], a man should not study Written and Oral Torah and then [show disrespect by] kick[ing] his father or mother or rabbi or the one who is greater than him in wisdom and rank,⁵⁸ for it says, *The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Adonai; a good understanding for all who do them* (Ps 111:10). It does not say, “for all who study them,” but “for all who do them,”⁵⁹ which means all who do them for their own sake, and not who do them *not* for their own sake. Each one who does [them] not for their own sake, it is better for him to not be created.⁶⁰

According to Rava, the goal of “wisdom” (i.e., knowledge of Torah) is to *perform* that wisdom—so that one might repair relationships and bring good into the world. He then warns that if the goal of one’s study is *not* to embody its teachings, then one should not engage in Torah, for that would be counter to its very purpose.⁶¹ Rava cites Ps 111:10 as his evidence. Rava points out that the verse does not say “for all who study them,” but “for all who do them,” which means the goal of Torah is not simply to know it, but to practice it. Thus, study alone is not sufficient, but must include the implementation of what is learned. As Rava argues, one must learn what are good deeds from Torah, and then perform those good deeds. In rabbinic understanding, “good deeds” are the *mitzvot*

⁵⁸ The word מִנֵּן has a range of meaning, which could include a certain number of people, as in a company of associates or friends, or the necessary men required for public prayer. It can also mean “ballot” or “vote,” as in one who has more influence. Here, I follow Maurice Simon’s translation of the word, which accounts for the Babylonian context of the text, in which the academy, where the rabbis and students studied, was structured by rank and prestige. For more on Babylonian academies, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 16-28.

⁵⁹ Here, I follow the Venice (1520-1523) and Soncino (1484-1519) printed editions and the Munich Manuscript 95, which has לְלִמְדֵיהֶם לֹא נֹאמַר כִּי אֵלֶּה לַעֲשִׂיהֶם. The Vilna edition has לְלִמְדֵיהֶם לֹא נֹאמַר לַעֲשִׂיהֶם (It does not say, “for all who do,” but “for all who do *them*”). This seems to be in error and based on the language later in the sentence.

⁶⁰ B. Berakhot 17a; translation is my own in consultation with Maurice Simon, trans., *The Soncino Babylonian Talmud: Berakhot*, ed. Isidore Epstein (Teaneck: Talmudic Books, 2012); and, Benoff, 114.

⁶¹ Interestingly, the cast of characters Rava underscores are all one’s teachers of Torah in one way or another. One might say these are extreme examples, as they epitomize the disconnection between study and action, where one is dealing wrongly with the very people who taught one.

(commandments)—specific, concrete actions as enumerated by the Written and Oral traditions. If one breaks one of the *mitzvot*, Rava states, one must repent.⁶²

Rava ends with a warning: the one who severs the link between study and practice commits *she-lo lishmah*—Torah “not for its own sake.” This one does not keep study and practice together, where one moves from the first to the second. It is evident, then, from this text that Rava is advocating a “functional definition” for *lishmah*, where study is intimately related to practice.

1.5.2 Second Text: R. Eleazar’s Functional-Devotional Definition

R. Eleazar stated: What is [the meaning of] what is written, *She opens her mouth with wisdom, and Torah of lovingkindness is on her tongue* (Prov 31:26)? Is there a Torah of lovingkindness and a Torah that is not of lovingkindness? But: Torah for its own sake is “Torah of lovingkindness”; Torah not for its own sake is a Torah which is not of lovingkindness.⁶³

R. Eleazar finds Prov 31:26 intriguing, because it seems to be adding a superfluous adjective, “lovingkindness,” when it speaks of Torah. In his mind, lovingkindness is inseparable from Torah; one cannot think of Torah as lacking lovingkindness. So why,

⁶² In other words, repentance and good deeds are not abstract concepts; they are specific actions. Rava helps make that clear in the example he offers of honoring father, mother, and teacher, which stem from the fifth commandment of the Decalogue. The example Rava chooses might seem arbitrary on the surface. What does the honor of father, mother, and teacher have to do with the fear of God? In general rabbinic understanding, the three are interrelated. Honoring/fearing parents is seen as equivalent to honoring/fearing God (e.g., *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 8). One’s teacher is also understood as a “father,” and deserves as much honor as at least one’s own parents (e.g., b. Bava Metzia 33a). Taking this into account, it is no arbitrary choice that Rava chooses honoring parents as his example. Since Ps 111:10 centers on fear of God, Rava instinctually thinks of parents and teachers.

⁶³ B. Sukkah 49b; translation is my own in consultation with Israel W. Slotki, trans., *The Soncino Babylonian Talmud: Sukkah*, ed. Isidore Epstein (Teaneck: Talmudic Books, 2012); and Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., “Perek IV,” in *Koren Talmud Bavli: Sukka*, vol. 10, ed. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2013), 240.

then, does Prov 31:26 say “Torah of lovingkindness”? This question leads R. Eleazar to a startling conclusion. He determines that there *are* in fact two kinds of Torah: one that is of lovingkindness and one that is not. The Torah of lovingkindness is *Torah lishmah*. The Torah that is devoid of lovingkindness is *she-lo lishmah*. But what exactly does Torah of lovingkindness mean? R. Eleazar’s statement seems to offer no further information. It appears the Stammaim, the anonymous editors of the Bavli,⁶⁴ are not entirely satisfied with this, and so they give the reader further information:

There are those who say: Torah [which is studied in order] to teach it is “Torah of lovingkindness,” but [Torah which is] not [studied in order] to teach it is “Torah that is not of lovingkindness.”

One could understand this additional text in one of two ways. One possibility is that the Stammaim are defining what R. Eleazar means by “Torah of lovingkindness.” In this view, according to the Stammaim, “Torah of lovingkindness” means to study Torah in order to teach it. This would be another functional definition of *Torah lishmah*.⁶⁵ Another possibility is that the Stammaim are providing a counterargument to R. Eleazar.⁶⁶ Here, while R. Eleazar categorizes Torah study as an actual act of lovingkindness, the Stammaim define “Torah of lovingkindness” as study-in-order-to-teach. If the second possibility is correct, to whom the lovingkindness is directed, according to R. Eleazar, is not readily apparent. One might presume it is directed toward God. Then again, the Prov

⁶⁴ For more on the Stammaim, see David Weiss Halivni, *The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud*, trans. Jeffrey Rubenstein (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See especially pp. 3-57.

⁶⁵ This would be one in which *lishmah* is gained specifically through the act of teaching. This would be in keeping with a rabbinic predilection for concrete action, where what might appear as an abstract category—in this case, “lovingkindness”—is actually a specific action. This is the interpretation the Arukh La-Ner (Jacob Ettlinger) adopts in his 1858 commentary on the Talmud, *Arukh La-Ner*, Sukkah 49b.

⁶⁶ This is a typical move in the Talmud, where alternate views are presented with no definitive resolution.

31:26 text that he cites derives from the so-called “woman of valor” poem.⁶⁷ If R. Eleazar has the full context of the poem in mind, the lovingkindness is directed toward one’s community. However, since no further information is provided, the reader must determine the recipient of lovingkindness. If the lovingkindness is directed toward God, then R. Eleazar is providing a “devotional definition.”⁶⁸ One studies Torah out of devotion to God. If the lovingkindness is directed toward the community, then R. Eleazar is providing more of a “functional definition.” One studies Torah in order to give of oneself to others.

Whichever interpretation one chooses, it is important to note that lovingkindness is not an abstract concept for the rabbis, nor is it solely an emotion or feeling. Rather, lovingkindness for the rabbis is understood as specific actions—ways of a giving one’s own self to another person—performed out of a mixture of loyalty and love toward that other person.⁶⁹ Taking this into account, if R. Eleazar *is* offering a functional definition, then Torah of lovingkindness is an act of giving of oneself in the form of teaching, done

⁶⁷ In this poem, a “capable woman” is defined as someone her husband trusts, who provides for his every need, who cares for her family, who works hard for her family, who maintains a thriving trade. Her children and husband praise her, and she fears the Lord.

⁶⁸ It is helpful to note that lovingkindness falls under two aspects of Lamm’s devotional definition. According to Lamm, the devotional definition has four forms: (1) “study primarily as the fulfillment of the divine command to study”; (2) “a special quality of the performance of the mitzvah to study—out of love”; (3) “study accompanied by a mystical meditation”; and (4) “study of Torah by means of which the presence of God is experientially affirmed (*devekut*)” (208-209). Lovingkindness encompasses the first of these four forms, and to some extent, the second, where lovingkindness is a specific action done out of a combination of loyalty and love toward another in need. See footnote 69 for more information.

⁶⁹ The word חסד is often translated “lovingkindness.” Hebrew language scholars are often quick to note that the word is extremely difficult to translate into English. In one sense, the term denotes a deep loyalty and a deep love that are intertwined and enduring, compelling an individual to act in specific ways out of that intertwined loyalty and love. During the rabbinic period, the term is also associated with an act of benevolence that one bestows, out of one’s own desire, on someone of need, known as גמילות חסדים. In b. Sukkah 49b, R. Eleazar appears again, arguing that גמילות חסדים is greater than צדקה (giving to others out of a sense of what justice demands). “Our rabbis” quoted after him expand on the idea, arguing that גמילות חסדים is superior, because while צדקה can only be done with money donated to the poor and to those living, גמילות חסדים can be done with money or oneself, to the poor or rich, or to the living or the dead. For more on the concept of lovingkindness, see Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 44-57.

out of loyalty-love, toward others, because those people are in need of Torah. Or, it is the pursuit of Torah study, so that one might fully know how to give of oneself to others, as outlined by the *mitzvot* (commandments) in Torah. If, however, he is offering a devotional definition, lovingkindness is directed toward God. The implication of this seems to be that God desires or needs Torah to be studied, and if one gives of oneself by studying Torah, and does it out of a loyalty-love, one is doing it *lishmah*.

1.5.3 Third Text: Rav Judah and the Cognitive Definition

Rav Judah said in the name of Rav: one should engage (עסק) constantly in Torah and the commandments, even not for their own sake,⁷⁰ for out engaging them for other reasons, one comes⁷¹ to engage them for their own sake.⁷²

Rav Judah's teaching appears to be a free-floating tradition that has been placed in a variety of contexts. For example, in b. Horayot 10b, Rav Judah's teaching appears within a discussion on the intentions behind sin and the practice of *mitzvot*. One of the primary questions is whether it is better to commit a sin with good intentions or perform a *mitzvah* with bad intentions. In the midst of this debate, the talmudic editors cite Rav Judah's statement.⁷³ In each context, Rav Judah's teaching addresses a person who is not capable

⁷⁰ The Hebrew is לשמם ("their own sake"), a variant of לשמה ("its own sake"). The pronoun is plural instead of singular, because both Torah and the commandments are the antecedents.

⁷¹ The word בא can be translated as an active participle, which suggests a continuous action: i.e., even amidst not doing them for their own sake, doing them for their own sake is emerging. The subject of the verb is ambiguous. It could be the man or לשמה.

⁷² B. Horayot 10b; translation is my own in consultation with Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., "Perek III," in *Koren Talmud Bavli: Avodah Zarah, Horayot*, vol. 32, ed. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2017), 490. See also parallels (which are exact) in b. Sotah 22b, b. Sotah 47a, b. Pesahim 50b, b. Sanhedrin 105b, b. Nazir 23b, and b. Arakhin 16b. See b. Berakhot 16b-17a for another example in this representative selection.

⁷³ In b. Horayot 10b, Rav Judah's statement is refuted at first, but then is repeated and becomes a topic of discussion. In b. Nazir 23b, Rav Judah's statement is refuted, while in b. Sotah 47a and b. Sanhedrin 105b, it becomes a direct topic of discussion.

yet of engaging Torah and the commandments for their own sake. His solution is that a concession must be allowed. The person should be allowed to perform Torah and the commandments for other reasons. It is this concession that will eventually enable this person to engage them for their own sake.⁷⁴

Beyond this, Rav Judah does not expound on what he means by *lishmah*. His understanding, however, could be found by examining more closely the phrase “Torah and the commandments.” In other contexts throughout rabbinic literature, these two words are a common expression, a hendiadys, in which Torah and commandments encapsulate a single concept. If this is what Rav Judah intends, then one has a functional definition, where Torah and performance are inseparable.

One might raise a tentative question, though, whether a distinction could be made here between Torah and commandments. Could it be that Rav Judah has in mind two kinds of performance *lishmah*: *Torah lishmah*, or study for its own sake, and *mitzvot lishmah*, or performance of commandments for their own sake?⁷⁵ I raise this also,

⁷⁴ A few of the parallels, including b. Nazir 23b, b. Sanhedrin 105b, b. Arakhin 16b, continue with an additional text, while the others do not. This addition reads: “For with the reward of forty-two sacrifices that the evil Balak sacrificed, he was found worthy, such that Ruth descended from him. And R. Yose in the name of R. Hanina said: Ruth was the daughter of the son of Eglon, king of Moab.” It may be that one version is more original than the other; though, it is difficult to say which. The purpose of the additional text seems to provide an extreme example. Balak’s primary appearance is in Numbers 22-24, and is best known for attempting to thwart the Israelites. He hires the assistance of Balaam to curse the Israelites, but Balaam joins the Israelites after the famous pericope of Balaam’s talking donkey. Balaam tricks Balak into sacrificing to God three times. Upon realizing Balaam’s treachery, the two part ways. Did Balak change his ways? It is not clear from the biblical text. The rabbis, however, knowing both Ruth and Balak are Moabites, suppose a familial connection between them, and see in Balak’s sacrifice a blessing. Thus, while Balak meant the sacrifices for evil (and not for a good purpose), it was still a meritorious action, and because of it, Ruth was born. So, out of evil intentions, something good emerges. Thus, as Rav Judah states, *she-lo lishmah* eventually does lead to *lishmah*.

⁷⁵ I raise this possibility with hesitancy, because study and practice are often seen as interrelated in rabbinic (and later Jewish) literature, where the purpose of study *is* practice. In this understanding, study is not an end in itself, nor can it ever be divorced from practice. The rabbinic and talmudic texts discussed thus far reinforce this point. Lamm also observes the integral connection between study and practice in his work. He notes that while the devotional and cognitive definitions do not place practice front and center, the proponents of these definitions believe that practice is still a “secondary element,” or at the very least, “the study of Torah [should] never be pursued with the conscious preclusion of the resulting

because there is a famous debate about the relationship between study and practice in rabbinic literature, with some rabbis arguing that one is greater than the other, and others that one precedes the other. While the debate was explicit in some places,⁷⁶ it appears to have been implicit in others, with a prime possibility being our present text. Rav Judah's statement, which I cited above, appears verbatim seven times in the Bavli. In the Yerushalmi, *Eikhah Rabbah*, and *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, the statement appears again,⁷⁷ but with two important differences: (1) these parallels do not include ובמצות ("and with the commandants") or לעולם ("constantly"); and (2) instead of עסק ("to busy oneself"), the parallels use the verb למד ("to study"). This second difference is the most significant: it states specifically that one should למד ("study") Torah—as opposed to עסק ("busy oneself") with Torah.⁷⁸ While עסק can include practice, למד is specifically about the act of studying. Thus, while Rav Judah's statement in the Bavli may be a hendiadys, where

implementation of the precepts studied" (192-93). Lamm cites *Sifre Devarim* 48 as one of the primary textual evidences: "'Which I command you to do it' (Deut 11:22)—why is it necessary to say this? Because it is stated, 'If, then, you shall faithfully keep [all this instruction...].' From this I might think that if one meditates in the words of Torah, he may sit by and not practice them. Therefore, it is said 'to do it'—the purpose is to do it" (205; translation is Lamm's).

⁷⁶ The primary example is the famous debate between the early sages over the question of whether study or practice is greater. R. Tarfon believes practice is greater, while R. Aqiva believes study is greater. The conclusion of the majority is that "study is greater, for study leads to practice" (b. Qiddushin 40b; translation is Lamm's). Lamm states that while this text might appear to support study over practice, if one reads it closely, the text seems to place practice as the greater of the two, and study as actually secondary; study is a "propaedeutic to practice... it is indispensable to practice and therefore has to come first, but it serves only as a means to achieve another end, namely, practice, which remains axiologically superior" (140-141). Lamm goes on to state that b. Bava Qamma 17a supports this understanding.

⁷⁷ See y. Hagigah 1:7 [76c], *Eikhah Rabbah* Petiḥa 2 (Buber Edition), and *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana* 15:5 for parallels in R. Huna's name, instead of Rav Joshua's. It should be noted that the inclusion of the petiḥot in *Eikhah Rabbah* is possibly later than the rest of the collection. However, a precise dating has yet to be determined. See Strack and Stemberger, 286-287.

⁷⁸ The contexts for all three appearances are similar. In the Yerushalmi, *Eikhah Rabbah*, and *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana*, study is compared to practice, and study is deemed the more important of the two. For example, R. Huna and R. Jeremiah in the name of R. Samuel bar R. Isaac state that the three greatest sins one could commit—idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder—are less serious than the neglect of Torah study. However, there is one significant difference between these three parallel contexts: in the Yerushalmi, the text goes on to state that a vote was made. This vote takes place in the House of Arius in Lydda, the same location in which the majority of sages in b. Qiddushin 40b determine that study leads to action (see n.50). In the Yerushalmi, the resolution is similarly that study precedes action.

study and performance are inseparable, the parallel statement in the Yerushalmi, et al., especially when juxtaposed with the Bavli, places its focus on Torah study.⁷⁹ Here, we are given a cognitive definition.

1.5.4 Fourth Text: R. Meir's Benefits

R. Meir says: each one who engages in Torah for its own sake is found worthy of many things, and not only this: all the world is worthy because of him. He is called a friend, a beloved, one who loves the All-Present, one who loves humankind, one who makes glad the All-Present, one who makes glad humanity; it [i.e., Torah] clothes him in humility and reverence, and it trains him to be righteous, pious, upright, and faithful; and it removes him from sin, and it draws him near to merit; and we enjoy from him counsel and comprehension, understanding and strength, as it is written, *For me is counsel and comprehension; I am understanding; for me is strength* (Prov 8:14); and it gives to him kingship and dominion, and [the faculty] to investigate judgment; and it reveals the secrets of Torah to him, and he is made like an everflowing spring, and like a river that does not cease; and behold, [he is] modest, patient, and he forgives insult to him; and it makes him famous, and elevates him over all [created] things.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ One might also mention a certain practicality in placing a value on Torah study alone. In the rabbinic period, there were many commandments that could not be observed, even if one wanted to. The most obvious commandments were those related to the Temple, which had been destroyed in 70 CE. Rather than abandon a hope for a restored Temple or suspend any focus on the Temple, one finds a strong current in rabbinic literature, in which the *study* of the Temple commandments are one way in which those commandments can be fulfilled (cf. b. Menahot 110a). For more on this topic, see Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 184-85, 203-209.

⁸⁰ M. Avot 6:1; translation is my own in consultation with H. M. Lazarus, M. H. Segal, and J. Israelstam, trans., *The Soncino Babylonian Talmud*: Makkoth, Eduyyoth, and Aboth, ed. Isidore Epstein (Teaneck: Talmudic Books, 2012). See b. Taanit 7a, b. Sanhedrin 26b, b. Sanhedrin 99b, b. Shabbat 63a, y. Hagigah 77b-77c (Venice ed.; also in Vilna ed.) for others in this representative selection. See also *Bereshit Rabbah* 9:5 for a similar understanding of *lishmah* that could imply Torah study; though, Torah is not mentioned in the text explicitly.

It is well known that chapter 6 of Avot (known also as Perek Rabbi Meir or Perek Kinyan Torah) is a later addition to the Bavli, included possibly for liturgical purposes, so that the text could be studied over the course of six Sabbaths (perhaps between Pesah and Shavuot). Mishnah Avot 6's exact provenance is unknown; though, it appears in *Kallah Rabbati* and *Tanna Devei Elijahu Zuta*, which were both composed after the talmudic period. The style and names of the tradents in Mishnah Avot 6 indicate that the chapter may have derived from the mishnaic period. See R. Travers Herford, *The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers* (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 5, 13. 148-150; and Leonard Kravitz and Kerry M. Olitzky, trans. and eds., *Pirke Avot: A Modern Commentary on Jewish Ethics* (New York: UAHC Press, 1993), 97-98. I have chosen to focus on this text, primarily because it is a well-known text within the

This famous text discusses all of the benefits that result from *Torah lishmah*. None of them require much explanation; however, it is important to underscore that even though many of them can be experienced here and now in this world, the irony is that one should not seek these benefits when engaging Torah. If one does, one would not actually be performing *Torah lishmah*, and as a result, one would never obtain these benefits. *Torah lishmah*, then, is engaging in Torah without the desire to reap any benefit for oneself.⁸¹ Seen in this way, R. Meir's statement becomes a list of examples of what *not* to seek after when engaging Torah.

1.6 THE MEANING OF *TORAH LISHMAH* FOR AN EVANGELICAL

Across the rabbinic texts, we receive various definitions for *Torah lishmah*: *Torah lishmah* is the movement from study to performance, a concrete enactment of lovingkindness toward God or community, a divestment of desire for any benefits, and study in and of itself. But beyond these, a more precise definition is not given. And when one seriously considers the meaning of the term, there is still an air of mystery: what exactly does it mean to study Torah for its own sake? On the one hand, the rabbis are usually extremely careful with defining their terms, especially because so much can hang on a single word. On the other hand, it is often the case in rabbinic literature that abstract

Jewish world, especially in its description of *Torah lishmah*, and also because its ideas have parallels in the Bavli.

⁸¹ One might rightly ask, though, why name these benefits in the first place, if not to entice people and ultimately position them for failure? There might be a connection between R. Meir and Rav Judah in the previous text, in that R. Meir names these benefits for those who are not ready to fully take on *Torah lishmah*.

categories that do not carry halakhic⁸² import often do not receive as much careful attention. Perhaps, to the rabbis, the term was obvious enough that it did not require a more specific definition.

If one were to focus on the meaning of Torah as “divine teaching,” then the phrase *Torah lishmah*, as the rabbis understood it, comes into view: *Torah lishmah* means to engage Torah, *because* it is divine teaching, *because* it was given by God for that purpose, every part—to be read, explored, learned, known, practiced. In this sense, Torah *lishmah* is not only a motivation, but a disposition, a way of approaching the text with an unmitigated openness to a teaching that was revealed specifically by the Creator. An opposite of this, then, would be *she-lo lishmah*: to approach the text—or certain parts of it—without an unmitigated openness or belief that it is divine teaching. *She-lo lishmah*, one might say, is a form of denial: of Torah, its call, its reason for existence, and ultimately, of the one who gave it.

As we have seen, across the rabbinic literature we find more than one understanding of *Torah lishmah*. Rather than synthesizing these different understandings into one, my proposal is to follow the rabbinic model and to let them stand as distinct, to select those that seem most helpful for the task at hand, and to keep in mind the others, as they may become important at some later point. Among the diversity, I propose adopting R. Eleazar’s devotional definition of lovingkindness toward God,⁸³ R. Huna’s cognitive

⁸² *Halakhah* can be roughly translated as “law.” However, it is important to note that the term comes from the root הלך, which means “to go” or “to walk.” In that sense, *halakhah* might be better translated as “the way to walk” in the world.

⁸³ Here, I make an explicit decision to view the object of lovingkindness for R. Eleazar as God instead of one’s community. However, by no means do I deny the possibility of the latter. Both are legitimate interpretations and need not be seen as in contradiction to each other.

definition, and R. Meir's statement about the benefits of *Torah lishmah*.⁸⁴ In this way, *Torah lishmah* for an evangelical can mean to study Torah—especially the legal material—not because it is applicable or beneficial, but because it is *divine teaching*, because it is given to be studied and known intimately in all its detail, in both its theological *and* embodied aspects, because it is an act of lovingkindness toward God, a giving of oneself out of love and loyalty.⁸⁵ This motivation and this disposition, I surmise, can help evangelicals receive the legal material as the invaluable gift it is, and to be more fully receptive to it in its entirety—to that which seems relevant at first look, and to that which might not.

My sense is that through the course of studying with *Torah lishmah*, numerous possible applications, as the OT scholars I mentioned above describe, will naturally become clear. Cataloging these will be important, so that we might eventually come to a better understanding of the legal material's role in our practice. But I suggest that no final decisions be made yet. Rather, I suggest that study of the legal material with *Torah*

⁸⁴ To be clear, I am drawing a distinction between study and practice. In doing this, I want to make clear that I am making a conscious choice. As Lamm and others have indicated, much of Jewish tradition (though, it would appear not all of it), at least since late antiquity, has understood a close connection between study and practice. *Torah lishmah* in this native context presumes a connection between the two, but only where practice is possible (for instance, study of laws related to sacrifices is fully “for its own sake,” without contemporary application). While acknowledging this, I am making clear that my adoption of the term for an evangelical context necessarily privileges some (interpretations) of certain texts over others. This involves some distortion of the term (from a Jewish perspective), so that it might fit within an evangelical context.

⁸⁵ Cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17. It should be noted that Dorsey explicates this 2 Timothy passage, arguing that the text makes clear all of the OT—including the legal texts—are relevant for a Christian: “each of the laws is inspired by God and that each is valuable for determining theological truths, for correcting misconceptions, for exposing and rectifying wrong behavior, and for training and equipping the Christian in practical, personal righteousness” (331). I agree with this interpretation, but would like to note that 2 Timothy does not mention “theological truths” explicitly. This is important, I believe, because it marks the difference between my proposal and Dorsey's. While Dorsey advocates the study of the OT laws for the development of theological insight, I would also argue that study of the non-abstract, concrete, embodied aspects of these laws—in all their detail, including those aspects that might not seem directly relevant to Christians—is also important. Without attention to the latter, one might miss important parts of the laws, which are also integrally part of “all Scripture.”

lishmah be the task at hand. Any other motivation or disposition, I suggest, should be bracketed for now, so that we do not limit our scope, evaluation, and openness prematurely, and so that we can engage in *Torah lishmah* as much as we are able.⁸⁶

1.7 TORAH LISHMAH AND THE DECALOGUE

An evangelical may ask how one might go about studying *Torah lishmah* with the OT legal corpus. I suggest that we have the rabbis to guide us: a vast array of texts from late antiquity onward, documenting the attempts of numerous rabbis to engage *Torah lishmah*, from midrash (e.g., lectionary-driven commentaries on Scripture)⁸⁷ to halakhah (e.g., the topically-organized legal traditions of the Mishnah, Tosefta, Yerushalmi, Bavli, etc.). I propose, then, that we read these texts alongside our own, so that we might learn what *Torah lishmah* is and how it might positively affect our approach to the legal material.⁸⁸

To begin this process and to help illustrate my proposal in this dissertation, I will start at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Words—that is, the Decalogue, as it

⁸⁶ The act of bracketing our pre-determined criteria is akin to the “moratorium” on the theology of religions that James Fredericks calls for in his *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999). I do not follow Fredericks’ argument completely, but I agree that our predisposition toward other religious traditions can prevent a wider capacity for creative thought and reception of those traditions. By bracketing our pre-determined criteria, at least as much as we are able, we may then be open to deeper insight. We may even be surprised, as age-old problems might be given new solutions and age-old solutions might be helpfully problematized.

⁸⁷ The earliest midrashim include *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael* for Exodus, *Sifra* for Leviticus, *Sifre Bamidbar* for Numbers, and *Sifre Devarim* for Deuteronomy.

⁸⁸ What I am not proposing is that we attempt solely or primarily to recover the original meanings or contexts of the Old or New Testaments. For example, I am not advocating using rabbinic texts to deepen our understanding of the world of the NT, which is often what rabbinic texts are used for (and is problematic methodologically, as these texts are all much later than the NT). An example of scholars using rabbinic texts to illuminate the original meaning of the NT would be Herbert W. Bassler, *The Mind Behind the Gospels: A Commentary to Matthew 1-14* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2009).

appears in Exod 20:2-17. I believe focusing on the Decalogue is especially conducive for evangelicals, because (1) it is a familiar text, which will facilitate interaction with (unfamiliar) rabbinic exegesis⁸⁹; (2) consequently, it is a text that holds at least some importance for evangelicals, which should cultivate interest in an initial sustained study of the legal material; (3) it is a small enough text to delve into deeply; and (4) it is a text that may at first sight appear relatively straightforward, but upon deeper reflection, contains an enormous range of complexities.

The rabbinic midrashic commentary I will use to engage the Decalogue is known as the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* (or “The Tractates of Rabbi Ishmael”), a tannaitic *halakhic* commentary on the Book of Exodus. In other words, it is a verse-by-verse, sometimes word by word, commentary on Exodus, collating the midrashim of rabbis from the first two centuries of the common era, and concentrating especially on the legal material of Exodus.

For those who are unfamiliar, “midrash” (pl. midrashim) derives from the word דרש (*darash*), which can be translated as “to search,” “to seek out,” “to investigate.” As James Kugel states, midrash refers to both an interpretive stance and a genre of rabbinic literature.⁹⁰ As the former, midrash attempts to resolve perceived problems in the biblical text (e.g., troublesome theology, redundancies, and misspellings), employing various methods to do so.⁹¹ As the latter, midrash can be thought of as a corpus of literature that

⁸⁹ The ultimate goal would be to engage in what evangelicals might consider the more obscure legal texts, but more modest steps must be made first, and the modesty of a recognizable text, I believe, can engender encouragement to progress more deeply.

⁹⁰ James Kugel, “Two Introductions to Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 3:2 (May 1983): 144.

⁹¹ For a good introduction to midrash, see James Kugel, *The Traditions of the Bible: A Guide to the Bible As It Was At the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 14-19; and Kugel, “Two Introductions,” 131-155. In *The Traditions of the Bible*, Kugel outlines four assumptions about the Bible among ancient interpreters: (1) the Bible is cryptic, requiring great interpretive effort; (2)

centers primarily on the interpretation of the Bible. Many, like the *Mekhilta*, are verse-by-verse commentaries, while others are organized thematically around festivals or Sabbaths.⁹² Some midrashic collections, such as the *Mekhilta*, concentrate more heavily on the legal material of the Hebrew Bible and are referred to as *midrash halakhah*. Others focus more on non-legal, narrative material and are classified as *midrash aggadah*.

The *Mekhilta* is one of the oldest midrashic compilations, with a final redaction date probably sometime in the second half of the third century CE.⁹³ It is attributed to R. Ishmael, a famous second-century rabbi, and founder of one of the most prominent tannaitic schools of interpretation. However, upon closer examination, modern critical scholars have concluded that the assembly of the *Mekhilta* likely had little to do with R. Ishmael himself,⁹⁴ though a large quantity of the midrashim in the *Mekhilta* follows the interpretive methods of R. Ishmael's school, and many of the rabbis cited lived during the second century. The purpose of the *Mekhilta*, and rabbinic compilations in general, is a matter of debate. Some argue they were used for pedagogical purposes, others that they were reference books for homilists, while still others believe they were deposits of scholarly insights.⁹⁵ Whatever their original intent, they offer a window into the diversity

the Bible is relevant, written directly to the people reading it; (3) the Bible is perfect, containing no contradictions or errors; (4) the Bible is divine, revealed by God. See also footnote 90 and p. 152ff.

⁹² For more on the genres of midrash, see Strack and Stemberger, 239-243.

⁹³ For a brief summary of scholarship surrounding the composition and date of the *Mekhilta*, see Strack and Stemberger, 253-255.

⁹⁴ As Strack and Stemberger note, the *Mekhilta* was likely not attributed to R. Ishmael because he commissioned or redacted it, but because *Pisha* 2 of the *Mekhilta* begins with a citation of R. Ishmael. This follows a medieval rabbinic practice of naming works after their authors. Indeed, the *Mekhilta* begins with *Pisha* 1, but *Pisha* 1 is understood as the introduction to the *Mekhilta*. See Strack and Stemberger, 252.

⁹⁵ See David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classical Midrash," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108-142. Stern observes that one possible purpose of midrashic anthologies that scholars often point to is found in the hermeneutical principle of polysemy: as a verse has multiple interpretations, so those multiple interpretations should be preserved. Recent historical evidence, however, shows that this view is anachronistic. It appears that presenting these multiple meanings was an invention, not of the originator of a particular tradition, but of the actual redactors, who may have written the stories that support polysemy themselves. If not polysemy,

of rabbinic thought, concerns, hermeneutics, presuppositions, and insights around the biblical text. Moreover, and specifically for our purposes, they provide in their vast array of commentary concrete ways to engage *Torah lishmah*.⁹⁶ The *Mekhilta*'s materials were widely cited, appearing in the Talmuds and in medieval Jewish Bible commentaries.

The *Mekhilta* is divided into nine tractates, covering Exodus 12:1-23:19; 31:12-17; and 35:1-3. The tractate that contains the Decalogue is called *Bahodesh*. My plan in this dissertation is to offer a supercommentary⁹⁷ on the *Mekhilta*'s interpretations of the Decalogue—that is, to facilitate an understanding of the methods deployed by the rabbis and the insights they generate from the text.

To help contextualize and ground my explication, I will compare the *Mekhilta*'s interpretations with those of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), one of the most influential theologians and exegetes among the Church Fathers, and certainly one of the

then where did the idea of anthologizing material come from? Stern first argues that it is actually an ancient Israelite technique, used in the Bible itself. Then, drawing on the work of Marc Hirshman, who discovered similarities between midrashic texts and the Christian patristic practice of catena commentary (concatenation of multiple texts with little or no opinion), Stern argues that the anthologizing of the midrashic texts can be seen as an attempt to create resource books. Most of the education of rabbis would have been done orally, but as time went on, certain rabbis wanted resources that they could use on their own or refer back to. So, beginning as “private notebooks,” in which the rabbis wrote down midrashic material, these texts eventually became more widespread, slowly taking on the form we have today through editing processes that made them more fluid volumes. This explains why the midrashic texts often exhibit “sparse, laconic, and almost stenographic literary forms” (128). See also W. David Nelson, “Orality and Mnemonics in Aggadic Midrash,” in *Midrash and Context: Proceedings from the 2004 and 2005 SBL Consultation on Midrash*, eds. Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007), 123-137. On the origins of midrash, see Paul Mandel, “The Origins of Midrash in the Second Temple Period,” in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Boston: Brill, 2006), 9-34, and also Paul Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash: From Teaching to Text* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). See also p. 403ff in chapter 7.

⁹⁶ The concept of *Torah lishmah* can be traced at least as far back as the Yerushalmi. In approaching rabbinic texts, I do not presume every rabbi contained therein believed or even knew what *Torah lishmah* was. In fact, the development of rabbinic compilations and rabbinic theories of their purposes appears to have developed over a long period of time. See p. 411ff for more. My proposal in this dissertation is to approach rabbinic texts as the rabbis who promoted *Torah lishmah* would. When they engaged rabbinic compilations, what did these texts teach them about *Torah lishmah*?

⁹⁷ That is, a commentary on a commentary. “Supercommentary” is a technical term in academic discussions of rabbinic and broader Jewish tradition.

most important progenitors of evangelical Christianity. As readers familiar with comparative work on rabbinic and patristic exegesis will observe, my approach is distinct from what has generally been done in the past. Rather than juxtaposing a vast array of rabbinic and patristic commentaries on a given biblical text, as others have sought to do,⁹⁸ I have chosen to narrow my focus to two texts, one rabbinic and one patristic. On the one hand, this approach follows a broader Christian comparative theological method of limiting the focus to two texts or sources. On the other hand, narrowing the focus will facilitate deeper and more sustained examinations of each individual source, along with their historical, exegetical, and theological relations to each other.⁹⁹

My selection of Augustine, as noted above, was determined partly because of Augustine's prominence in the history of Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in particular. In addition to this, I chose Augustine because his literature contains some of the most comprehensive and sustained commentaries of the Decalogue among the Church Fathers, which in turn has allowed for more extensive comparisons with the *Mekhilta*. As some readers will already know, the vast majority of Augustine's works revolve around controversies.¹⁰⁰ Of the works that reference Exod 20:3-11, only *trin.*, *ench.*, and some of Augustine's homilies and expositions are not explicitly polemical. Augustine spent much of his early career as a Christian battling Manicheanism and Donatism, the former of

⁹⁸ E.g., Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, *The Book of Genesis in Late Antiquity: Encounters Between Jewish and Christian Exegesis* (Boston: Brill, 2013); John Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Boston: Brill, 2011).

⁹⁹ This is not to say one approach is superior to the other. Rather, each approach will yield different results. Analyzing a gamut of texts will allow for more global conclusions of rabbinic and patristic exegesis. Meanwhile, analyzing two texts will allow for deeper investigations of those sources.

¹⁰⁰ For more on Augustine's exegesis, see Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph Schnaubelt, eds., *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001). Explications of Augustine's hermeneutics will also appear throughout the chapter on Augustine.

which appears throughout Augustine's interpretations of Exod 20:3-11.¹⁰¹ By 411 CE, Augustine's polemical foil became Pelagianism, and this remained his primary focus till the end of his life.¹⁰² My approach to Augustine will be to gather and analyze in their original context all of Augustine's comments on Exodus 20:3-17.¹⁰³

Together, the *Mekhilta* and Augustine's interpretations will then be brought into conversation with contemporary evangelical commentaries of the Decalogue. Through these comparisons, my plan is to explore the meaning and significance of *Torah lishmah* for an evangelical. This will involve examining similarities and differences in presuppositions, approaches, interests, methods, and insights. As one will see, *numerous* practical benefits that the OT scholars I mentioned above describe will become clear. Indeed, as R. Meir stated earlier, *Torah lishmah* leads to a myriad of rewards (e.g., an increase of knowledge, wisdom, love of God and neighbors).¹⁰⁴ I underscore these sorts of practical outcomes throughout the dissertation, especially through insights derived from the *Mekhilta* that I believe are meaningful for evangelicals.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, discovering these benefits is an integral part of *Torah lishmah*. But to be clear, this is not the sole or primary aim. To reduce one's engagement with the Law to simply those benefits would be to disengage from *Torah lishmah*. *Torah lishmah*, in contrast, is an unmitigated openness to the text. It is a mode that, beyond practical benefits, seeks out that which

¹⁰¹ These works are *qu. hept.*, *ep. 55*, *c. Faust.*, and *c. Adim.* A description of Manicheanism can be found on footnote 606.

¹⁰² His primary works that reference Exod 20:3-11 are *spir. et. litt.*, *c. ep. pel.*, *c. Iul.*, and *c. Iul. imp.* A description of Pelagianism can be found on footnote 571.

¹⁰³ This has been done with the assistance of *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* 3.

¹⁰⁴ See *Pirke Avot* 6:1.

¹⁰⁵ I will also underscore insights unique to patristic texts. These, however, will only be for those interested in patristics. Interest in the church fathers among evangelicals has risen in the last decade—e.g., see Bryan M. Lifesten, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007)—however, I do not presume an exact overlap with those who have interest in rabbinic texts.

may seem relevant and that which may not, stirring an aspect of our createdness, which might be called worship, or perhaps in a more basic sense, life itself in nearness to God. Benefits do follow, but the order, as the rabbis maintain, makes the difference.

1.8 LIMITS AND FUTURE STUDY

This dissertation is the *first* of what will eventually be a two-part project. In this first part, I examine Exod 20:2-11 (i.e., up to the command to keep the Sabbath). The remainder, Exod 20:12-17, will be the subject of a second project. As many have argued, there appears a natural break in the Decalogue at v. 11, a transition from commands related to God to those related to humans, which allows for this split. On a practical level, to handle the entire Decalogue in one project would have proven too lengthy and cumbersome.

Even though the dissertation only focuses on the first half of the Decalogue, space constraints did not allow me to examine every single one of the *Mekhilta's* midrashim. If I were to examine all of the midrashim adequately, the dissertation would require an additional few hundred pages. Thus, for the sake of space, I have limited my commentary to those midrashim that I believe are the most significant in the *Mekhilta* for evangelicals. Perhaps in a future project, I may be able to return to those midrashim that I could not examine in this project.

1.9 TRANSLATION AND CRITICAL EDITIONS

The critical edition and English translation of the *Mekhilta* used in the dissertation are the work of Jacob Lauterbach, who originally published his edition in three volumes, between 1933-1935. The version of Lauterbach's edition used in this dissertation was produced by the Jewish Publication Society in 2004, and appears in two volumes.¹⁰⁶ Lauterbach's edition is eclectic, meaning that he reconstructs what he believes is the original text of the *Mekhilta* from carefully examining all known manuscripts, early editions, and excerpts of the *Mekhilta* found in other rabbinic texts; most of his choices, though, are based on agreements between the 1291 Oxford manuscript and the 1433 Munich manuscript of the *Mekhilta*. In addition, I compare Lauterbach's edition with the 1931 Horowitz-Rabin critical edition of the *Mekhilta*, which uses the 1545 Venice edition as its base text, and provides sporadic corrections, based on the manuscripts of the *Mekhilta* and other rabbinic sources.¹⁰⁷ The English translations, throughout, reproduce Lauterbach's,¹⁰⁸ with my critiques and comments in the footnotes.

Biblical quotations throughout use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise noted. The NRSV is one of the most common translations used in contemporary academic study of the Bible. Its familiarity among contemporary readers

¹⁰⁶ Jacob Lauterbach, ed. and trans., *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael: A Critical Edition, Based on the Manuscripts and Early Editions, with an English Translation, Introduction, and Notes*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

¹⁰⁷ H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael: cum variislectionibus et adnotationibus* (Francofurti ad Moenum: Kauffmann, 1931).

For more on manuscripts and critical editions of the *Mekhilta*, see Günter Stemberger, "Mekhilta de-R. Yishmael: Some Aspects of its Redaction," in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, eds. Ra'anan S. Boustan, et al., vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 465-474.

¹⁰⁸ Reproduced from *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, translated by Jacob Z. Lauterbach, by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 1993, 2004 by The Jewish Publication Society.

will help underscore the similarities and differences between how a contemporary reader and the rabbis translate or understand a text.

1.10 STRUCTURE AND APPROACH

The dissertation is divided into eight chapters. Chapter two is an analysis of contemporary evangelical scholarship on the Decalogue. As I note in chapter two, the volume of scholarly evangelical literature on the Decalogue is vast, spanning tens of thousands of works. In order to narrow the focus and concentrate on material that is relevant to this project, I have centered the chapter on literature that meets the following parameters. Works that are: (1) single-volume commentaries on Exodus¹⁰⁹; (2) self-identified as evangelical or among those that evangelicals would generally include in a corpus of evangelical commentaries on Exodus¹¹⁰; (3) contemporary¹¹¹; and (4) scholarly.¹¹² To help condense and organize the material, I concentrate on five representative commentaries, written by Douglas Stuart, Terence Fretheim, Peter Enns, Victor Hamilton, and Thomas Dozeman. In the body of the chapter, I summarize each commentary in its integrity, and also provide brief analyses and comparisons between their methods and content. In the footnotes, I refer to similar interpretations of other

¹⁰⁹ Focusing on single-volume commentaries helps create parity with the *Mekhilta*, which is also a single-volume commentary on Exodus.

¹¹⁰ To identify these commentaries, I have consulted Tremper Longman's *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2013).

¹¹¹ Commentaries that were published within the last thirty years.

¹¹² Commentaries written by experts in the Hebrew Bible or related fields.

commentators, noting important variant interpretations and occasional disagreements between scholars.

Chapter three addresses Augustine's commentary on the Decalogue. As noted above, Augustine's interpretations are spread across multiple works written throughout his career. Chapter three gathers, synthesizes, and analyzes all of Augustine's comments on Exodus 20:3-11. Since most of Augustine's interpretations emerge from theological controversies—Manicheanism, Donatism, and, in the latter years of his career, Pelagianism—I explicate Augustine's specific exegeses in their chronological, and dialogical or polemical contexts.

The overall goal of these two chapters is to create “maps,” as it were, of the exegetical landscapes of evangelical commentaries and Augustine. The process I use to compare these maps with the *Mekhilta*'s I am calling “georeferencing,” a term I am borrowing from geospacial information studies, in which maps (e.g., of roads or urban developments) are overlaid on real geographical landscapes. These maps help align and determine the locations of these roads or developments with actual geographical spaces. Using the biblical text as a geographical space, in my comparisons, I overlay the evangelical, patristic, and rabbinic “maps” simultaneously, in order to determine commonalities, intersections, and particularities.

In chapters four through seven, I construct a supercommentary on the *Mekhilta*. In the *Mekhilta*'s counting, Exod 20:2-11 is split into four commandments: v. 2 composes the first commandment, vv. 3-6 the second, v. 7 the third, and v. 8-11 the fourth. In successive order, each chapter will center on one of the commandments. Following the pattern of the series “Christian Commentaries on Non-Christian Sacred Text,” and

specifically the commentary on Mishnah Avot by Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski from that series,¹¹³ I subdivide the *Mekhilta*'s midrashim into smaller logical units. For each unit, I move in three steps. I first begin with Lauterbach's translation. In the footnotes, I annotate significant textual variants to Lauterbach's version and sometimes suggest alternative translations. Next, I offer a supercommentary on the midrash, explicating its methods, content, and historical context.¹¹⁴ After this, I engage in a brief comparison of the *Mekhilta*, Augustine, and the evangelical commentators' exegeses, followed by a reflection on insights a Christian might glean for his/her own understanding of the Decalogue. My goal with the supercommentary is not to describe every possible meaning the midrashim hold. Rather, my intent is to facilitate the reader's understanding. The same goes with my comparisons and constructive proposals: my goal is not exhaustively to list every point of comparison and insight; rather, I identify one or two of what I believe are the most significant points of comparison and learning that a Christian reader may derive from the process. I fully expect that readers may derive many others of their own.

It may be tempting to skip my supercommentary on the *Mekhilta* and go straight to the comparisons or to simply read my comparisons and insights without interacting with them and seeking out one's own. Each of the three parts—supercommentary, comparison, and insights—are integral to the process, as is the reader's own interaction with the material. Together, they lead toward *Torah lishmah*, the exploration of the legal material in all its vastness. So, if I may, I recommend that readers immerse themselves in

¹¹³ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *The More Torah, the More Life: A Christian Commentary on Mishnah Avot* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018).

¹¹⁴ As the more experienced reader of midrash will observe, I take a minimalist approach with rabbinic texts, examining parallel passages or texts that offer contextual clues from the tannaitic period.

all of it: the biblical text, the *Mekhilta*, my commentary, comparisons, and constructive proposals—to leave no part out and see where it might lead.

In the final chapter of this dissertation, I will reflect on what the five-year process of reading the Decalogue with *Torah lishmah* as my disposition has been like for me personally, how it has changed me and my understanding and approach to the legal material. In addition, I will reflect on what this project contributes to the field of comparative theology more broadly and Jewish-Christian dialogue more specifically.

Throughout each chapter, I assume moderate familiarity with evangelical exegesis, minor familiarity with Augustine, and little or no exposure to rabbinic exegesis. At the end of chapter two, the reader will find a brief general description of rabbinic interpretation. In the supercommentary chapters, I delve more deeply into explanations of the exegetical methods and presuppositions of the rabbis, cross-referencing where possible, so as to avoid needlessly duplicating material.

Having introduced my focus and my aims in this dissertation, I turn first to evangelical exegesis of the Decalogue over the last thirty years.

2.0 CHAPTER 2: EVANGELICAL COMMENTARIES ON THE DECALOGUE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to survey recent evangelical exegesis of the Decalogue, as presented in Exodus 20:2-17. Its goal, as explained in the introduction to the dissertation, is to build an evangelical “map,” which can be juxtaposed with the rabbinic and patristic maps that will be constructed in the next several chapters. Placed together, these maps will indicate points of commonalities and differences between each commentary of the Decalogue. The overall goal of this project is not to highlight aspects of evangelical scholarship that are critically deficient and in need of revision. This project proceeds with the belief that evangelical scholarship, as a whole, is sound, but that its methods and presuppositions direct that interpretations be produced in particular ways. This is, of course, true of any interpretation. Entering into another tradition which holds its own methods and presuppositions and juxtaposing these with this evangelical scholarship will uncover ways in which evangelical insights might be strengthened, complemented, and even challenged.

The volume of scholarly evangelical literature on the Decalogue is vast, spanning tens of thousands of works. In order to narrow the focus here and concentrate on material that is relevant to this project, I have centered the chapter on literature that meets the

following parameters. It is a: (1) single-volume commentary on Exodus¹¹⁵; (2) self-identified as evangelical or among those that evangelicals would generally include in a corpus of evangelical commentaries on Exodus¹¹⁶; (3) contemporary¹¹⁷; and (4) scholarly.¹¹⁸

Even with these parameters, the number of commentaries on Exodus is extensive and relatively diverse in method and content. To help condense and organize the material, I have chosen to concentrate on five representative commentaries. These commentaries are written by Douglas Stuart,¹¹⁹ Terence Fretheim,¹²⁰ Peter Enns,¹²¹ Victor Hamilton,¹²² and Thomas Dozeman.¹²³ They were selected for three primary reasons. (1) Each engages in one of four general modes of commentary exposition:

1. Expository – detailed verse-by-verse or section-by-section exegesis of the biblical text, often paying particular attention to theological issues. Verse-by-verse commentaries tend to pay more attention to historical and technical issues.
2. Devotional – special emphasis on contemporary application, or the meaning of the biblical text for modern Christians.
3. Exegetical – special emphasis on technical issues in the biblical text, especially issues related to grammar and the original language(s).

¹¹⁵ I.e., excluded are commentaries that focus on the entire Bible or multiple books of the Bible. Concentrating on single-volume commentaries creates a parity with the *Mekhilta*, which is also a single-volume commentary on Exodus.

¹¹⁶ To aid in identifying these types of commentaries, I consulted Tremper Longman's well-regarded *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, now in its fifth ed.

¹¹⁷ Commentaries that were published within the last thirty years.

¹¹⁸ Commentaries written by experts in the Hebrew Bible or related fields. Its intended audience might include biblical scholars, pastors, theologians, students, and amateurs—essentially those for whom this project is geared.

¹¹⁹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006).

¹²⁰ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991).

¹²¹ Peter Enns, *Exodus: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000).

¹²² Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹²³ Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

4. Historical – special emphasis on higher critical issues, such as source and redaction criticism, and the history of scholarship of the biblical text.¹²⁴

Stuart uses a verse-by-verse expository approach, Fretheim a section-by-section expository mode, Enns a devotional approach; Hamilton an exegetical mode, and Dozeman a historical approach. (2) The commentaries are more comprehensive in their content and scope than other commentaries in the mode they represent. (3) The commentators represent a diversity of views and denominational commitments, which will become apparent in a few areas throughout the chapter.¹²⁵

In the body of the chapter, I summarize each commentary in its integrity, and also provide brief analyses and comparisons between their methods and content. I begin first with Stuart, and then move to Fretheim, Enns, Hamilton, and finally Dozeman. The order of presentation was determined by the comprehensiveness of each commentary,¹²⁶ which facilitated the flow of the chapter, in addition to the reputation among evangelicals of both the commentary itself¹²⁷ and the commentary mode.¹²⁸ In the footnotes, I refer to similar interpretations of other commentators, noting important variant interpretations and occasional disagreements between scholars. For each of the five commentaries, I begin with describing the commentary's overall goals. From here, I summarize the

¹²⁴ The primary distinction of each mode is found in its emphasis. All four general modes typically engage all of the other modes, but with comparatively less attention.

¹²⁵ Stuart, Enns, and Dozeman come from the Reformed tradition (Stuart is Congregationalist and Dozeman is Presbyterian); Fretheim is Lutheran; and Hamilton is Wesleyan.

¹²⁶ I.e., moving from more comprehensive to less comprehensive.

¹²⁷ Reputation was determined both by Longman's *Old Testament Commentary Survey* and John Dyer, "Commentaries on Exodus," Best Commentaries, <https://www.bestcommentaries.com/exodus/> (accessed February 15, 2019). The latter is an aggregate site, which ranks commentaries based on journal reviews and acquisition by libraries.

¹²⁸ There is a tendency to gravitate more toward expository commentaries, as they usually balance exposition of the text, technical issues, history, and theology more than other modes. After this, a desire for theological analysis often places devotional commentaries above exegetical and then historical commentaries.

commentator's explication of the purpose of the Law,¹²⁹ then introductory remarks about the Decalogue, followed by the exegesis of Exod 20:2-11. At the end of each of these sections, I provide a brief analysis of the commentator's method and content, and compare these with the other commentators. All biblical citations and quotations are from the authors' commentaries, unless otherwise stated. With a few interpretations, one or more of the five commentators overlap. In these instances, I note the repetitions in the footnotes at the first mention of the interpretation. The only exception is if the integrity of the author's comment would be seriously disrupted without mentioning the interpretation. In such cases, I leave the interpretation intact. At the end of the chapter, I identify the most significant interpretive moves between the commentators, while also offering a preview of how the rabbinic exegesis will strengthen, complement, or challenge evangelical exegesis.

One of the hallmarks of modern evangelical commentaries is a verse-by-verse or section-by-section examination of the biblical text, coupled with explicit or implicit attention to its meaning for contemporary Christians. In general, evangelical commentators are not simply interested in the original meaning of a biblical text. They want to discern the meaning for contemporary Christian life. The approach Enns explicitly takes in his commentary is the same approach the other commentators take, by and large, even if they do not state this explicitly or proceed in the same perfunctory

¹²⁹ The term "Law" means the legal material of the Hebrew Bible or the Torah in general. This is a standard evangelical shorthand. The term "Law" is often viewed in negative terms in evangelical contexts (viz., cold, inflexible legalism, which is contrasted with grace and love), but is not necessarily meant in that way in all uses of the term. It is important to note that the term "Law" on its own does not necessarily encapsulate what the biblical texts and the rabbis meant by Torah or *halakhah*. For more on biblical and rabbinic understandings, see footnote 82. See also Greg Mobley, *Return of the Chaos Monsters and Other Backstories of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 34-47. Since this chapter is not a critique of evangelical commentaries, I follow the commentators' use of the term, and define what they mean by "Law" when they provide definitions.

manner. Enns begins with the “original meaning,” or the meaning of the text for the original audience. He then moves to “bridging contexts,” which traces the development of the ideas and concepts in the Exodus text through the rest of the OT and NT. After this, Enns turns to “contemporary significance,” discerning the ways in which the biblical text might speak to contemporary issues.¹³⁰ One tends to notice explicit signs of the three-stage approach when evangelical commentators are dealing with biblical texts that do not have obvious connections—or seem problematic—to the New Testament or contemporary application. In addition, the three-stage approach tends to appear more explicitly in expository, exegetical, and devotional commentaries, and less prominently in historical commentaries.

Non-evangelical confessional commentaries may also take a three-stage approach; however, the interpretations they derive are often rooted in specific denominational commitments, which evangelicals themselves may not necessarily hold. For example, Thomas Joseph White, in his commentary on Exodus, draws on his Catholic tradition to

¹³⁰ This three-stage process is articulated throughout various descriptive analyses and prescriptive proposals of evangelical exegesis. E.g., see David Dockery, *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 158-169; John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 238-253; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centered Hermeneutics: Foundations and Principles of Evangelical Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 310-312; Walter Kaiser, Jr., “Evangelical Hermeneutics: Restatement, Advance or Retreat from the Reformation?,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46:2-3 (April-June 1982), 174-175, 177; Charlie Trimm, “Evangelicals, Theology, and Biblical Interpretation: Reflections on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20:3 (2010), 321, 323, 325-326, 329-330; Al Wolters, “Confessional Criticism and the Night Visions of Zechariah,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller (Carlisle: Paternoster Publishing, 2000), 90-117.

The origins of evangelical exegesis can be traced at least to Martin Luther, with his call for *sola scriptura* (i.e., a reliance on the Bible and its literal-historical interpretation over the Catholic magisterium and its allegorical exegesis); Desiderius Erasmus, with his desire to study the biblical texts in their original languages; John Calvin, with his focus on the historical interpretation of the text, from which the spiritual meaning should be derived; and Jonathan Edwards and the Pietist movement, with their emphasis on the practical application of the biblical text. For a brief history of the development of evangelical exegesis, see Dockery, 129-148.

argue that the Decalogue possesses “perennial importance” for Christians.¹³¹ He then proceeds to draw on Bonaventure, a medieval Catholic theologian, to argue that the Decalogue has both a literal and spiritual sense.¹³² Some evangelicals might not ultimately disagree with White’s conclusions; however, they would typically not turn to Catholic sources or methods to arrive at them. Far more common would be sources that derive from Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, and Puritan traditions.

Non-confessional commentaries, such as those of William Propp¹³³ or Carol Meyers¹³⁴, have no commitment to Christian beliefs or practices, utilizing philology, textual criticism, and historical criticism to discover the original meaning of the text. This means that the application of the text for a confessional reader is not in view. An example of the closest Propp comes to contemporary application can be found in his comment on the purpose of the Decalogue. He writes that the Decalogue “represents someone’s notion of what it means to belong to Israel, Yahweh’s ‘priests’ kingdom and holy nation.” He then states that the only commandments of the Decalogue that are unique among the nations are its exclusive worship of Yahweh, prohibition on idolatry, and Sabbath. But the “genius” of the Decalogue “was to take what everybody acknowledged as right, and attribute its origin to Yahweh as a special gift to Israel.” In doing this, the Decalogue is able to claim that commandments concerning God cannot be separated from commandments concerning humans. Whoever engages in one, must also engage in the other. Likewise, whoever breaks one, most likely breaks the other. Anyone who does not

¹³¹ Thomas Joseph White, OP, *Exodus*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 5, 20-21

¹³² White, 151-158.

¹³³ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

¹³⁴ Carol Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

possess one or the other (i.e., other nations), is “basically immoral.”¹³⁵ A Christian could certainly extrapolate a contemporary significance from this; though, Propp’s aim is to understand the significance of the Decalogue for ancient Israelite religion. When the interpretations of confessional commentators are taken up in non-confessional commentaries, this is only in service to discovering the original meaning of the text. For example, in determining the numeration of the Decalogue, Propp discusses Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish counting systems. He finds the Catholic approach improbable, with its splitting of v. 17 into two commandments. The Jewish method of taking v. 2 as a commandment he also argues against, since v. 2 contains no imperative. The approach of Philo, followed by Zwingli and Calvin, splits v. 3 and vv. 4-6 into two commandments. This seems the most “obvious”; however, one could argue that v. 3 is a commandment, of which vv. 4-6 provides the detail. Propp ultimately decides that none of the approaches is satisfactory, because each falls short in some way. He then speculates that the number ten seems to be more “symbolic” than anything. Perhaps the inability to numerate it is part of what makes it alluring.¹³⁶

The evangelical belief that the biblical text speaks to Christians in the present presumes a particular theology of the Bible. Foremost, the Bible is “divinely inspired” and the “final authority on matters of faith and practice.”¹³⁷ What makes the Bible the final authority is that it is revelation that proceeds from the eternal God. Thus, an encounter with the text is an encounter with truth that, by its very nature, has a bearing on

¹³⁵ Propp, 303.

¹³⁶ Propp, 302-304.

¹³⁷ Timothy Larson, “Defining and Locating Evangelicalism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds. Timothy Larson and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1. See also Goldsworthy, 44-50.

one's life, no matter how distant that life is from the original audience. The process by which one receives that truth, however, is crucial. God reveals God's self through history, which means that the Bible is both a product of history *and* a vessel of eternal truth.¹³⁸ Thus, to understand the biblical text correctly, one must examine the history, genre, and authorial intent that gave shape to the biblical text, in addition to the historical context to which the biblical text refers.¹³⁹ However, God also revealed God's self definitively in Jesus Christ, who then charged several apostles to spread his understanding of the biblical tradition. Therefore, one's interpretation of the OT is incomplete without understanding it in light of the NT. Embedded in this belief is a presumption that the biblical texts present a unified message across the testaments, that this message is developed over time, and that later generations, particularly the NT authors, are able to discern the full meaning and significance of the message that the original authors may or may not have been fully aware of.¹⁴⁰ The hermeneutical key to understanding the full meaning and significance of the biblical texts is Christ. As Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Christ interprets all facts,

¹³⁸ See Christopher M. Hays and Christopher B. Ansberry, eds., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2013), 1-7, 208-209.

¹³⁹ There is a range in the optimism evangelical scholars have about the utility of historical investigation and criticism. Some see investigation of the history behind/of the text as a control that prevents eisegesis. One knows an interpretation is possible if it is in accord with the original meaning of the text. E.g., see Dockery, 161, 166, 168; Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 27-29, 243, 281; Trimm, "Evangelicals," 329. Another position holds that, especially for instruction texts, historical investigation reveals the specific context to which instruction texts are to be applied, which must be considered before discerning the applicability of the commandment today (see Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 9). Few would reject the necessity of historical investigation today, but some caution against placing too much confidence in its ability to illuminate the biblical text, especially when the scholarship is speculative (e.g., Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 6-7, 250-252), or is governed by an extreme skepticism about the historical legitimacy of the biblical text (e.g., Kaiser, "Evangelical Hermeneutics," 174-175).

¹⁴⁰ See Dockery, 160; Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 9-10, 20, 238-239, 240-242, 279-280. Goldingay cautions that a correct reading of the OT and NT cannot lead one to the conclusion that the God of love and grace only exists in the NT. Seeing the unity of the testaments requires one to see the same loving and gracious God in both testaments. In addition, a correct reading of the OT and NT does not lead one to "read Jesus into the First Testament," or "find spurious predictions of Jesus in the First Testament" (*Key Questions*, 241). The continuity between the testaments resides primarily in the historical development outlined across the two testaments, not the allegorical methods of past centuries. In addition, there are insights to be found only in the OT.

since all things were created in him, through him and for him (Col 1:16). As the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5), Christ mediates the ultimate truth of God about all things and thus about the meaning of the Bible.”¹⁴¹ Thus, an evangelical comes to understand the full meaning of the OT only in light of the gospel—the life, death and resurrection of Christ—as articulated in the NT.¹⁴²

For each scholar, then, the first stage is to discern the meaning of the text in its original context. One will often utilize parallel texts (e.g., within the Hebrew Bible, or the Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch), extrabiblical texts (e.g., Code of Hammurabi or various Targumim), and other archaeological findings from the ANE world to smooth out oddities or corruptions in the text (known as textual criticism), and to illuminate the history, composition, and meaning of the text (known as historical criticism). In addition, commentators may focus on the final form of the text, paying special attention to the grammar or structure (literary criticism), or parallel texts in other parts of the Hebrew Bible (canonical criticism), especially to address evangelical or broader Protestant concerns.¹⁴³ There is openness to the possibility of borrowing by the biblical authors from other cultures, but often the reflex is to use other ANE sources to illuminate the distinctiveness of the biblical witness.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Goldsworthy, 48.

¹⁴² Goldsworthy, 58, 62-63. Goldsworthy is careful to note that even though Christ is the hermeneutical key, one cannot rely solely on NT texts that explicitly discuss Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. One needs the OT, which forms the foundation and context of the Christ event. See Goldsworthy, 66, 303-305, 307. See also Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 20, 105. Goldingay argues forcefully that neither the OT nor the NT can be understood without the other. Both must be understood in light of the other.

¹⁴³ This may partly be because evangelical and broader Protestant concerns often revolve around sensitive theological issues. Since literary and canonical criticism are generally considered more conservative, interpreters may turn to them because they will be perceived as less controversial and speculative.

¹⁴⁴ One can see this tension between possible borrowing and uniqueness most vividly in the comparisons of the Sinai covenant with the Hittite vassal treaty and the Decalogue with other ANE law codes. It could be argued that many of the commentators operate with an open inclusivism: they believe the

The second stage is to discover the ways in which the biblical text has been received in the NT. This is done in preparation for the third stage. One looks for verbatim or variant quotations or thematic parallels. The goal is to discern how the text was understood and developed among the NT authors. While the NT cannot necessarily speak to the original meaning, its interpretations, as stated above, must be consulted in order to discern the biblical text's application for contemporary life.

This leads to the third stage. In addition to consultation with the NT, a commentator will dialogue with his/her own theological assumptions, or those of his/her intended audience, to discern the meaning of the biblical text for a modern Christian. There is sometimes a tension between what a modern Christian might expect from the text and what the text actually says. This usually gives the commentator an opportunity to challenge his/her readers.¹⁴⁵ It is also the case that a commentator may not always spell out a contemporary application. This is often because the application is apparent.

As stated above, this three-stage approach is present in most, if not all, evangelical commentaries, even if the commentators do not identify each stage explicitly. In the presentation that follows, I will highlight these stages throughout the commentaries, in addition to mapping out and comparing their content.

biblical witness to be unparalleled, but *aspects* of its truth can be found in other cultures, and may even be derived from them. See Kristin Beise Kiblinger, "Relating Theology of Religions and Comparative Theology," in *The New Comparative Theology*, ed. Francis Clooney (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 21-42.

¹⁴⁵ The three-stage process explicated above is not always done in a systematic manner. Often, one stage is collapsed into another, creating a situation in which one's interest and one's encounter with the text are influenced by one's theological assumptions—while simultaneously, one's assumptions and interest are shaped by the text. On this phenomenon, and its unavoidability, see Wolters, 108-111. Nevertheless, Goldingay argues, one of the purposes of critical scholarship is to disrupt traditional interpretations and doctrines. This is what it means to place Scripture as the final authority. See Goldingay, *Key Questions*, 244-246.

The following analysis is admittedly lengthy. To facilitate the reader's ability to navigate the commentaries and discern patterns among the commentators, I will delineate here ten general interpretive concerns that one will find across the evangelical commentaries in this chapter:

1. A desire to explain Exod 20:2 as describing a positive relationship between Law and grace.
2. A discussion of whether Exod 20:3 presumes the existence of other gods, or supports a notion that Israel moved from henotheism/monolatry to monotheism.
3. An attempt to discern the contemporary significance of Exod 20:3. Belief in one God seems obvious to many, if not all, evangelicals today, which can raise the question of why Exod 20:3 would be necessary. In light of this, many of the commentators investigate whether Exod 20:3 has other relevant meanings.
4. A debate on whether Exod 20:4-6 prohibits religious images.
5. A question on whether Exod 20:4-6 claims that God can be jealous, a (petty) emotion one might presume is limited to (postlapsarian) humans.
6. A concern whether the cross-generational punishment described in Exod 20:4-6 supports the punishment of innocent people.
7. A question on whether Exod 20:7 merely prohibits false oaths, or has a broader applicability.
8. A desire to reconcile the discrepancies in the Sabbath commandment in Exod 20:8-11 and Deut 5:12-15.
9. An effort to discern what kind of work is prohibited in Exod 20:8-11
10. A debate on whether Exod 20:8-11 still applies to Christians

As the reader will find throughout this chapter, the evangelical commentaries will cluster around one or several positions in response to these concerns. At the end of the chapter, I will return to this list of concerns, and will summarize these positions. Furthermore, in anticipation of the *Mekhilta* chapters, I will discuss how these ten concerns and the evangelical commentators' responses to them will relate to the *Mekhilta*'s approach to the Decalogue.

2.2 DOUGLAS STUART

Douglas Stuart is currently a professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Stuart's 2006 commentary is part of the *New American Commentary* series, an updated version of the *American Commentary Series* published a century ago. The goal is to take God's timeless message and apply it, with recourse to the latest scholarship, to the challenges of the twenty-first century.¹⁴⁶ The series, and its contributors, explicitly speak from the evangelical tradition, and assume the "divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible." Each commentary centers on the theological message of the text, and also seeks to explicate the historical context, literary aspects, and contemporary meaning and application of the text for the church. Specifically, the series is intended to "build up the church, encourage obedience, and bring renewal to God's people."¹⁴⁷ Attention is also paid to the theological unity of each book. By default, the commentaries utilize the NIV translation, because of its "faithfulness to the original languages and its beautiful and readable style." However, all of the commentators are free to disagree with the NIV and give their own translation.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Stuart states that he draws on secondary literature, but only to the extent that it helps illuminate interpretations that are meaningful and applicable for the church. See Stuart, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Stuart, 8.

¹⁴⁸ Stuart, 7-8.

2.2.1 The Purpose of the Law

For Stuart, acceptance of the Sinai covenant entails Israel's separation from the other nations as God's "treasured possession"¹⁴⁹ (i.e., adopted members of God's family).¹⁵⁰ If Israel is to be in a covenantal relationship with a holy God, it must receive guidance from God on how to be holy. The Law is what provides that guidance. The Law also gives instructions on how to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation,"¹⁵¹ a task and identity Israel also assumes as part of the covenant. This entails bringing others into communion with God and spreading the revelation of God by being an example to other nations: viz., showing the world through belief and actions a better life with God, inviting the world to join God and accept God's truth and covenant, interceding for others through offerings, keeping God's promises, and recording God's truth and preserving it in the Scriptures. The reward for remaining in a covenantal relationship is both a successful life on earth and eternal life with God.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Exod. 19:5.

¹⁵⁰ For a similar interpretation, see Donald D. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 175-177, 182, 187. Working with the analogy of adoption, Gowan states that just as an adoptee is chosen out of the adopter's own volition, so too Israel was chosen by God out of God's own volition. The parent-child relationship helps make sense of why God gives Israel a series of commandments: to teach Israel, as a parent teaches a child. The analogy of adopted child breaks down, Gowan admits, with God's possession of Israel (parents do not own children the way God does Israel) and the level of obedience God requires. Furthermore, Israel has the free choice to enter into this covenant with God, which is another place the analogy breaks down.

¹⁵¹ Exod 19:6.

¹⁵² Stuart, 44-45, 422-424. For similar interpretations, see Godfrey Ashby, *Go Out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 86-87; Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 1-18*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 28; Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 1-2, 12-15, 34, 37-38; Richard Coggins, *The Book of Exodus*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), 72; John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, vol. 2, EP Study Commentary (Darlington: EP Books, 2014), 15, 18-19; Dozeman, 415-416, 424-426, 438-447, 474; Enns, 387-389; Fretheim, 21-22, 208-214, 216-217, 219; Christopher Gilbert and Robert C. Stallman, *Exodus*, The Bible and Your Work Study Series (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 31-33; Hamilton, 302-303, 327-328; Allan M. Harman, *Exodus: God's Kingdom of Priests* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2017), 206; J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 132-136; Goran Larsson,

Stuart draws on his study of the ANE context to show that one particular way in which the Law distinguishes Israel from the other nations is that while polytheistic nations received good favor from their deities through worship offerings (e.g., food), only Israel's God required that his people live ethically. The ways in which God outlines Israel's ethics, Stuart states, can be found most particularly in the Decalogue, which summarizes all of the other commandments. The Law, then, enables one to "draw near to God"; however, the Law itself does not save a person. Rather, the Law "provided the standards by which someone saved by faith could know how to respond to the new Master he or she had taken in becoming an Israelite." In other words, the Law does not save a person; rather, it indicates how a person *who is already saved* should live. Salvation, then, comes with expectations, or a "proof of loyalty" to God, which are

Bound For Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 128-129, 132; John L. Mackay, *Exodus*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 10, 326-329, 338-339; J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 195-201; Hugh R. Page, *Exodus: A Bible Commentary for Every Day*, The People's Bible Commentary (Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2006), 78, 80; H. Junia Pokrifka, *Exodus: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2018), 43-44, 207-208; Coy D. Roper, *Exodus: An Exegesis and Application of the Holy Scriptures*, Truth for Today Commentary (Searcy: Resource Publications, 2008), 303, 308-309, 316-317; Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 456-461, 495-598; Mark Scarlata, *The Abiding Presence: A Theological Commentary on Exodus* (London: SCM Press, 2018), 23-24, 147-148, 153-159; Ernst H. Wendland, *Exodus*, People's Bible Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), 113-115; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Delivered (Exodus): Finding Freedom by Following God*, The BE Series Commentary (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1998), 103-104, 107.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Pokrifka stresses that God does not demand perfection at the outset. God knows the people will fail to uphold the law and that being transformed through the law is a slow process. The laws will eventually lead the people away from their "old life" in Egypt into their "new life" in the Land. The Law, however, is not optional; Israel must follow the law in order to be God's elect. After all, Israel cannot be God's witness to the world if it is disobedient. This is also true for the church. Scarlata emphasizes that God's presence is required for deliverance and sure passage to the Land, and that the presence is incumbent on Israel's ability to remain holy by upholding the commandments, both individually and as a community. Moreover, if Israel breaks the commandments, chaos and destruction are brought into the community and also the world. Knowing God entails following God's commandments. Carpenter notes that the laws are also necessary for Israel to remain in the land. Roper states that the implication for Christians is that like Israel, a Christian's relationship with God requires faithfulness to the covenant. Enns states that being set apart as a holy nation does not mean Israel is separated from the other nations. Their very function as priests means that they live a distinct life, but they are involved in the world, bearing witness of God to other nations.

articulated by the commandments. Stuart then states that upholding the commandants is the way in which Israel can show its gratitude for salvation.¹⁵³

Particularly notable in Stuart's interpretation is a positive evaluation of the Law, likely due, either directly or indirectly, to the influence of the New Perspective.¹⁵⁴ Such a positive reading of the Law still bucks against popular antinomian readings of Paul in various evangelical circles. Stuart's belief that the Law does not save a person, but shows what a new life in God should look like is akin to a New Perspective covenantal nomist position (see footnote 154). Without having to be explicit, the application of Exodus' theology of law for Christians in the present is clear. Israel's relation to the Law should be similar to Christianity's.

¹⁵³ Stuart, 44-45. Using the analogy of a family, Stuart states that like any household, to be in God's house, one must follow the "house rules."

Stuart defines "salvation" as "far more than a happy life on earth [i.e., deliverance from Egypt and life in the Land of Israel]. It is nothing short of an eternal relationship that begins to take a person out of the limits of temporal living for temporal pleasures and leads that person to eternal life in a setting where all the highest and noblest desires of life are actually provided instead of merely dreamed about" (Stuart, 44). It should be noted that Stuart is analyzing the biblical text through an evangelical lens, with particular sensitivity to an evangelical definition of salvation. To be sure, the way in which Stuart describes salvation would likely have been foreign to the Israelites of the exodus, and perhaps biblical Israel in general. The Israelites of the exodus would have understood the notion of "salvation" in much more concrete terms (i.e., deliverance from Egypt and life in the Land of Israel).

¹⁵⁴ Prominent scholars and works in the New Perspective include Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *Harvard Theological Review* 56:3 (July 1963): 199-215; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); and N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005). In general, the New Perspective argues against a (primarily Protestant) traditional reading of Paul, in which the apostle argues passionately against Judaism and the Law. Rather than being an antinomist, Paul was actually a covenantal nomist, a Jew who believed the purpose of the Law was to ensure Jews remain loyal to the covenant, rather than work their way into it. Jews, in this view, were already members of the covenant.

2.2.2 Introductory Remarks on the Decalogue

Stuart states that the covenant in Exodus-Deuteronomy is modeled after a “suzerainty treaty.” In this form of treaty, a greater power either conquers or rescues a smaller nation (in the case of Israel, the latter) and offers benefits and protection if the smaller power abides by certain stipulations.¹⁵⁵ Stuart outlines the six-part structure of the suzerainty treaty, and identifies the parts of Exodus that parallel the structure:

1. Preamble: which identifies the giver and recipients of the covenant (“the Lord your God,” [Exod] 20:2)
2. Prologue: a reminder of the relationship of the suzerain to the people (“who brought you out of Egypt,” [Exod] 20:2)
3. Stipulations: various laws/obligations on the part of the people ([Exod] 20:3-23:19; 25:1-31:18)
4. List of witnesses to the covenant (“I am Yahweh,” Exod 29:46; 31:13; Lev 11:44)
5. Document clause: providing for writing down of the covenant so that periodic reading and relearning of the covenant can take place as time goes by (see Exod 24:4, 7, 12)
6. Sanctions: blessings and curses as incentives for obedience (see Exod 20:5-6, 12, 24; 23:20-31; cf. Lev 26:3-14 [blessings]; 26:14-39 [curses]; 26:40-45 [restoration blessing])¹⁵⁶

Exodus does not identify the contents of the Decalogue as laws or commandments. The contents do provide commands, but they could not be characterized simply as laws. Rather, the Decalogue functions like the U.S. Constitution, with the

¹⁵⁵ Stuart, 439-440.

¹⁵⁶ Stuart, 439. For Stuart, Exodus-Leviticus forms the full covenant and its stipulations. Numbers and Deuteronomy are further developments. For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 82-83; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32; Currid, 36; Hamilton, 320; Harman, 211-212; Mackay, 322, 340; Page, 80; Pokrifka 206, 215; Roper, 322; Scarlata, 150, 152. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Ashby points out that one particular difference between ANE treaties and the OT is that while the greater power usually subjugates the lesser power, in the OT, God frees Israel from Egypt. Bailey also provides an ANE treaty outline. It follows Stuart’s for the most part, but calls number five a “provisions” section. He lists Exod 25:16 and Deut 31:10-13 as the texts that lay this out (32-33).

Covenant Code and other legal material acting like federal laws, which are specific applications of the constitution in various situations.¹⁵⁷

The Decalogue is technically addressed to individual males, but this does not exclude groups of males or females. The way in which legal codes of the ANE were written is to present cases and situations from which related cases and situations could be extrapolated. Thus, even though the Decalogue speaks only to individual males, an Israelite or a judge is expected to determine the ways in which the law should be applied to groups or females.¹⁵⁸ One will find that some laws are broad (e.g., “love Yahweh your God”) and some are more specific (e.g., “do not bear false witness”). This variation in the

¹⁵⁷ Stuart, 440-441. For similar interpretations, see Randall C. Bailey, *Exodus*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 2007), 33, 35; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32-34, 38, 55; Coggins, 76-77; Currid, 34; Dozeman, 469-474; Fretheim, 221-223; Duane Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2014), 459-473; Harman, 200, 211; J. Janzen, 140; Larsson, 155; Motyer, 215-216, 219; Roper, 31; Wendland, 112, 119, 122. Roper states also that the Decalogue is not only the foundation of the other commandments, but also “representative” of them.

¹⁵⁸ For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 35-36; Dozeman, 457-464; Fretheim, 220. See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 27, n. 112, 114; Mackay, 344; Roper, 321; Scarlata, 157. Mackay argues that the singular “you” is used in the commandments to elicit an individual response from everyone. That is how a lasting loyalty is built: by individuals, not nations, pledging loyalty.

For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see Coggins, 79-80; J. Janzen, 140-141; W. Janzen, 253-254; William Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2014), *Exodus 20-40*, 24-27; Larsson, 144-145; Mackay, 349. W. Janzen believes that the second person singular could be addressed to every Israelite, but it could also be addressed to the head of a household. W. Janzen points to Exod 20:8-11 as a primary example of why the latter might apply. Indeed, every Israelite had a duty to uphold the commandments; the head of the house, though, had a special responsibility to ensure that each member of the family did. If the head of household is what is meant by the second person singular, then it would appear that the Decalogue’s selection of laws center exclusively around the household. Other codes, then, have different emphases. For example, the Covenant Code centers on the clan. For Johnstone, the “you” refers unambiguously to the head of house, and more specifically, an adult male from the “middle generation” (i.e., neither grandparent nor children), who owns animals, servants, and takes care of resident aliens. His responsibility is to ensure that his entire household observes the commandments. Admittedly, the Decalogue imagines a patriarchal house, but this house encompasses all humans, and also the land and animals, as well. Thus, though the text addresses the head of the house directly, it implies everyone else in the house also. The Decalogue also imagines a society with very little (if any) government and no poverty: the image is of groups of families living stably from generation-to-generation in an agrarian society. The logic behind this is that “social harmony” is maintained through obedience to God. This “idyllic” picture is clearly of D origin, written in the exile and imagining a (successful) return to Israel. In reality, for many Israelites, the actual attainability of this idyllic vision was impractical, if not impossible for multiple reasons—namely, not everyone inherited adequate resources, nor were able to obtain them, no matter their efforts. In light of this, it appears that the Decalogue is meant to depict an ideal situation, from which Israelites should model their own lives.

laws is intended to encourage the people to see that God's law is absolutely comprehensive, covering every detail; thus, one's goal is to discover all of the implications of the laws, rather than only holding to what the "exact wording" states.¹⁵⁹

Biblical law has "three levels of specificity." The first is composed of the "two great commandments": "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5) and "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18b). The second is the Decalogue, and the third is the other 601 in the Pentateuch.¹⁶⁰ Jesus "approved" the two greatest commandments,¹⁶¹ and stated that the rest "hang" on them.¹⁶² The first four commandments of the Decalogue hang on the commandment to love God, and the second six on the commandment to love others. In this way, the first four are "vertical commandments," and are "balanced" by the other six, which are "horizontal commandments."¹⁶³ Out of the Ten come the 601.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Stuart, 442-445. For similar interpretations, see Currid, 35; Pokrifka, 215; Ryken, 505-506.

¹⁶⁰ Here, Stuart follows a "traditional Jewish" counting system that identifies six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah. Stuart finds this numbering convenient, but does not see in it any deeper significance. See Stuart, 442, n. 10.

¹⁶¹ See Lk 10:25-28; Mk 12:28-34; and Matt 19:19.

¹⁶² See Matt 22:40. For a similar interpretation, see Ryken, 487.

¹⁶³ For similar interpretations, see T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 105; Bailey, 215; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 34; Currid, 34; Dozeman, 469-474, 479-480; Enns, 419-420; Fretheim, 223, 230; Garrett, 139-141, 459-460, 469, 473; J. Janzen, 141; Waldemar Janzen, *Exodus*, Believer's Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2000), 261; Larsson, 142; Mackay, 339-340, 342; Motyer, 215, 221-222; Page, 80; Roper, 321; Ryken, 486; Scarlata, 158-159; Wendland, 122-123; Wiersbe, 108.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Alexander states that the commandments related to God and commandments related to humans are intimately connected. The Decalogue begins first with emphasizing devotion to God alone. It follows from this that loyalty to God requires one to treat others in certain ways; the second half explains how exactly one is to do this. Enns states that the division into vertical and horizontal commandments does not mean that the vertical commandments are religious, and the horizontal ones are ethical. All of them come from God, and so all of them are religious. Scarlata points out a division dating back to Philo in which the commandments are divided in half with the honoring parents commandment as the first in the second half. This creates a parity between the first and fifth commandments, with "parents" beginning each list. Scarlata sees this as a possible division, especially for "didactic purposes." On this matter, Enns states that it could be that the first four were written on one tablet, and the second six on the other tablet. It could also be that the second tablet was a copy of the first, following the practice of Hittite legal treaties. Since the Bible itself does not speak of the division, Enns sees no reason to offer definitive argument.

¹⁶⁴ Stuart, 441-442. See also Ryken, 509-511.

These laws take on a new form with the New Covenant. The two greatest commandments become known as the “Law of Christ.”¹⁶⁵ No longer is it necessary to remember all 613 commandments. The Spirit has taken the Ten Commandments, which were written on stone, along with the 601 that “hang” on them, and inscribed them on the mind with the Law of Christ,¹⁶⁶ so that one may now follow the two greatest commandments with the help of the Spirit.¹⁶⁷ If one chooses, one may refer to the Ten Commandments, or the other 601, to assist one in discerning how to properly follow the Law of Christ.¹⁶⁸

In order to discern the significance of the Decalogue for contemporary Christianity, Stuart in this section systematically applies the three-stage process outlined in the introduction to this chapter. To uncover the original function, purpose, and audience of the Decalogue, he begins in the ANE world, and then filters his exegesis through the NT witness to discuss the commandments’ role and function in the present. His conclusion is that the Decalogue, along with the other commandments of Torah, are subsumed under the two greatest commandments, or the Law of Christ. The exegetical approach Stuart takes is one of the most popular approaches across all of the evangelical commentaries examined in this chapter, reflecting its high degree of popularity in evangelical circles.

¹⁶⁵ See Gal 6:2.

¹⁶⁶ See Jer 31:31-34 and Rom 2:15.

¹⁶⁷ One might wonder why the two greatest commandments were not given at the beginning, and why they only appear in Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18. The answer is that the ability properly to understand and appreciate the two greatest commandments required knowledge and understanding of the other 611. Thus, those were given first so that the people could be properly prepared.

¹⁶⁸ Stuart, 444.

2.2.3 The Prologue: Exod 20:2

The prologue, Stuart states, identifies the parties involved and describes their relationship. God is Israel's sovereign. The covenant will bind Israel and God into a "legal relationship." Israel is addressed as an entire nation in the singular "you." God refers to God's self as "I," and then switches to the third person in v. 7 after it has been clearly established that God is the sovereign in the relationship.¹⁶⁹

The phrase "who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery" forms the prologue of Israel's suzerain-style covenant with God. As the prologue, it describes how the parties came to develop a relationship. In freeing Israel from Egypt, Yahweh has formed a *hesed* relationship with Israel, in which the loyalty of one side requires the loyalty of the other.¹⁷⁰ Most especially, if one side saves the other, the other has a permanent "lasting moral obligation" and must show "permanent gratitude."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Stuart, 446. For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 36-37; Fretheim, 220.

¹⁷⁰ Stuart adopts his translation of *hesed* as "loyalty" from Katharine Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 17 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978).

¹⁷¹ Stuart, 446-447. Stuart notes that this is a common semitic understanding. However, what is unique is that Yahweh has rescued an entire people, something that has not been done in any literature found from the ANE.

For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 218; W. Janzen, 254-255; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 41-45; Mackay, 10; Pokrifka, 215-216. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. According to Pokrifka, the concept that recalling past deeds then generates gratitude and loyalty continues in the NT with Christ's salvation of humanity. Those who have been redeemed by Christ show their gratitude and loyalty to Christ by loving others. Thus, in both the OT and NT salvation precedes commandment; salvation generates obedience. (See footnote 153 on salvation. It is important to note that "salvation" is not a static term, but bears different meanings in the OT, NT, and among Christians today.) See also James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 182; Larsson, 139. Bruckner, who takes v. 2-3 as the first commandment, argues that the purpose of the commandment is to recite it and thereby remember that Israel's monotheism is founded on the exodus event. As God freed the Israelites from Egypt, God will liberate every generation afterward from any god, person, or force that has power over them. In this way, freedom can only exist when there is no other god before God. The commandment demands that one observe it by keeping God first in how one acts, what one speaks, and what one thinks. Larsson comes close to accepting v. 2 as the first commandment. The reason is that Christians often forget v. 2, which causes them to think of the law as separate from grace. In actuality, v. 2 is centered on God's grace, and shows how the law is an outgrowth of grace. For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 36; Garrett, 473. Garrett

After analyzing the grammar of the Decalogue's prologue, Stuart then uses Exod 20:2 to recapitulate the introductory remarks he made about the Law and the Decalogue (summarized in sections 2.2.1-2.2.2 above). As we will see, this will be a common interpretive move among the commentators. The prologue (Exod 20:2) essentially becomes an opportunity to reinforce and prove that their understanding of the Law and Decalogue is present in the biblical text, and is therefore correct.

2.2.4 First Commandment: Exod 20:3

Stuart states that how one translates עָלַי (often “before me” or “other than me”) has large implications. The translation “before me” would presume a henotheistic theology, in which God—above all other gods—is to receive Israel's loyalty. Meanwhile, the translation “other than me” presumes a monotheistic theology, in which there is only one God. Stuart examines the appearance of the construction with a noun or pronoun as its *nomen rectum* in place of the pronominal suffix in other parts of the Pentateuch,¹⁷² and finds a wide semantic range. He also examines the construction with a pronominal suffix outside the Pentateuch.¹⁷³ From all of this, he finds that the construction is best translated as “against [me/you/them].”¹⁷⁴ His examination of the LXX, Syriac, and Targums’

is emphatic that v. 2 is not a commandment. While Jewish tradition holds that v. 2 is a commandment to believe in God, Garrett states that “belief is simply assumed” (473). The point of the verse is to indicate that God has the right to call Israel God's own, partly because of their acceptance (Exod 19:8), and partly because God rescued them. In this way, the verse operates as a “prolegomenon” for the commandments that follow. See also Motyer, 211-213. In Motyer's interpretation, the address, “I am the Lord” is not so much a demand for obedience, but a call to imitate God and thus be what God intended: an image of God.

¹⁷² Gen 49:30; Exod 20:20; Lev 9:24; Num 14:5; 16:22, 45; 20:6; Deut 6:7; 11:4.

¹⁷³ Isa 65:3; Jer 6:7; Nah 2:1.

¹⁷⁴ Stuart admits that “in my presence” is also a possible translation.

translation of Exod 20:3 supports this translation.¹⁷⁵ Thus, Stuart believes the First Word should be translated as “You must have no other gods over against me,” or alternatively, “You must have no other gods in distinction to me,”¹⁷⁶ i.e., Israel is prohibited from acknowledging any other god.¹⁷⁷ Certainly, the command “I am the only God. Don’t believe in any other” would have been much more straightforward. The reason why the Decalogue has “You must have no other gods over against me”¹⁷⁸ is because the term אֱלֹהִים has a semantic range that includes not only “gods” but “supernatural beings” (e.g., angels), as well. Thus, the First Word acknowledges that such supernatural beings do exist, and commands loyalty to Yahweh alone.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ These translations take עַל פְּנֵי to mean “in addition to me,” which implies an exclusive, rather than a hierarchical, relationship.

¹⁷⁶ Stuart, 448-449. Ashby prefers an English idiom which conveys a similar meaning: “to my face.” What the commandment is saying is that “You shall have no other gods to my face.” See Ashby, 88. See also Garrett, 470, n. 1. Garrett argues that 1 Kgs 9:7 offers the best clue to the phrase’s meaning. The force of the construction is a command to “send away” from one’s face something that is “offensive.” In other words, worshiping other gods would be an “insult” and offensive.

¹⁷⁷ Stuart notes that some scholars believe the original form of the commandment was “You must have no other gods.” The phrase “before me” was eventually included, so as to emphasize singular loyalty to Yahweh. Since there is no evidence for a shorter form of the Decalogue, Stuart himself does not hold it.

For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 88; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 38-39; Currid, 37, 43; Gilbert and Stallman, 40-41, 43-45; Hamilton, 328-329; Harman, 214-215; J. Janzen, 143-144; W. Janzen, 280-281; Larsson, 143-144; Mackay, 343-344; Motyer, 222-223; Page, 81, 83; Pokrifka, 217-218; Roper, 322; Ryken, 512-526; Scarlata, 159; Wiersbe, 109-110.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Hamilton states that Exod 20:3 must be read in light of Deut 4:35, 39, which denies the existence of other gods. When this is done, it becomes clear that Exod 20:3 denies the existence of other gods. Ashby finds the commandment still relevant today. In our modern context, the commandment means, “You shall have no other priority in life before God” (88). Pokrifka states that people commit polytheism today not only by worshiping other gods or acknowledging the equal validity of other religions (i.e., religious pluralism), but by devotion to money (1 Tim 6:9-10), political leaders or parties, or other things that detract from the devotion that one should actually have toward God. W. Janzen adds that for today, “other gods” can include “philosophies, ideologies, material possessions, and goals, or anything that may claim our total allegiance, devotion, or effort” (280). They also include practices or ideas of other religious traditions—which may offer comfort or aid—but detract from devotion to God. J. Janzen sees v. 3 as prohibiting commitment to an ultimate power that one believes can effect change. Seen from this angle, the relevance of the commandment for Christians in the present is wide. Ryken states that today we can discern whether we are breaking the first commandment by asking what/who we love and what/who we trust. If it is anything other than God, then we are breaking the first commandment. The only true way out of polytheism is to love Christ and trust in him alone. Currid, Page, Wiersbe, and Gilbert and Stallman extend these contemporary applications to the second commandment (Exod 20:4-6).

¹⁷⁸ Stuart, 449.

¹⁷⁹ Stuart, 448-449. Stuart points to Psalm 82 and Jn 10:34-36 as other texts that acknowledge this.

Stuart's entire comment on the first commandment engages the debate on whether the Bible acknowledges the existence of other gods, a debate of concern to most evangelical commentators. The possibility of henotheism or monolatry¹⁸⁰ runs completely counter to evangelical (and broader Christian) theology, which staunchly upholds monotheism.¹⁸¹ While some critical commentaries (especially those that are non-confessional) may not find an issue with henotheism or monolatry in the biblical witness,¹⁸² for many evangelical (and confessional) commentators, the suggestion that the Bible presumes the existence of other gods is nothing less than scandalous.¹⁸³ Stuart therefore centers his entire comment on denying that the first commandment accepts the existence of other gods. He employs a grammatical approach,¹⁸⁴ engaging in a careful study of עַל פְּנֵי, its appearance in the rest of the Bible and its translations in the LXX, Syriac, and Targums. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, evangelicals often employ a grammatical approach to address their specific concerns.

2.2.5 Second Commandment: Exod 20:4-6

The Second Word, according to Stuart, prohibits idolatry in any form. The NIV states, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below." A more precise translation would be, "You

¹⁸⁰ The former is devotion to one god above other gods, while the latter is devotion to one god alone, while acknowledging other gods exist.

¹⁸¹ An evangelical may point to such biblical texts as Rom 3:30; 1 Cor 8:6; 1 Tim 2:5 or the Nicene Creed as proof.

¹⁸² E.g., see Propp, 167; Meyers, 169.

¹⁸³ There are exceptions. For example, see Dozeman below.

¹⁸⁴ A grammatical approach places special emphasis on Hebrew grammar and syntax in a biblical verse, often engaging in word studies to determine the meaning and interpretation of a text.

must not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth.”¹⁸⁵ The commandment uses both פֶּסֶל and תְּמוּנָה, two synonyms for “idol,” which is a way of emphasizing “any sort of idol” is intended. But it is more than gods that cannot be represented. The commandment includes anything in heaven, earth, or beneath—nothing in creation can be represented for the purpose of veneration.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Stuart, 450.

¹⁸⁶ Stuart, 449-450. The tabernacle and ritual accoutrements were no exception. It would be erroneous to think the Israelites worshiped these. Rather, they were used only to facilitate one’s worship of God.

For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 89; Bruckner, 182-183; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 39-41; Currid, 39, 43; Garrett, 475-476; Harman, 215; J. Janzen, 144-146; W. Janzen, 255-257, 281-282; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28-30; Larsson, 143; Mackay, 344-345; Motyer, 217-218; Pokrifka, 218-219, 221; Roper, 324-325; Ryken, 527-529, 533-534; Scarlata, 160-161.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Johnstone argues that P’s insertion of a ו before תְּמוּנָה changes the commandment so that any visual art is prohibited from being worshiped. However, the commandment does not rule out artwork for other purposes.

W. Janzen notes the tension within the church today between those who accept artwork and veneration of images (inheritors of the Catholic position via Lutherans) and those who oppose artwork, either completely or for the most part (inheritors of Zwingli, Calvin, the Puritans, Anabaptists, and Mennonites). For Janzen, idolatry can occur with anything, whether it be with artwork or even music, film, language, etc. It is not that any of these should be prohibited. Rather, one should be mindful of their use, so that they do not become idols. W. Janzen also notes that humans bear the image of God. This might give the impression that humans could potentially be used as channels of worship or even be objects of worship, but one must keep in mind that the words used to describe the divine resemblance in Gen 1:26-27 are different than Exod 20:4-6. Thus, Israel was not to turn to humans as idols. For Christians, Christ offers an alternative to idols: himself as God’s image.

Ashby notes that some Christians have taken the commandment to the extreme, banning in iconoclastic movements all images, such as the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth century. Regrettably, Ashby states, a good deal of Christian artwork that was used as aids in the worship of God was lost. He adds that to create an image of God is unnecessary, since God’s image is already humanity itself.

For Pokrifka, humans were charged by God to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26). Thus, it is backwards for humans to deify anything in creation or use anything in creation to help depict the divine. The incarnation does present an issue. Christians have made images of Christ, and have turned them into idols. The banning of images of Christ should not be absolute. But if images are used, Christians should be extremely cautious to employ them only for pedagogical or historical purposes.

Garrett examines the commandment closely, arguing that it makes two specific prohibitions: images of God (לִפְסֵל can more broadly mean artwork of any kind in this context); and תְּשַׁתְּחֶה, which specifically means bowing down or other physical acts of devotion. This rules out all images of God, even images of Jesus. No text in the NT authorizes an image of Jesus. This also rules out bowing down to any image, even an image of a saint or angel. Garrett turns to the ANE context for evidence: ancient people knew the images were not actual gods, just as a Catholic might argue, and ancient people (e.g., Imhotep in the Old Kingdom of Egypt) would construct images of “deified mortals,” who were “elevated to a high status” and could be “entreated for help,” not dissimilar to a saint in Catholicism. These ANE understandings of idolatry were what the prohibition of the Decalogue had in mind. Thus, it is clear that Catholic and Orthodox Christian practices would also be in the purview of the commandment (475-476).

Today, Stuart notes, one often thinks of idolatry as “the practice of worshiping by means of statues and/or pictures as focal points for worship.” In the biblical world, idolatry included “an entire, elaborate religious system and lifestyle.”¹⁸⁷ Idolatry, even for Israel, had a powerful allure. Stuart outlines several reasons: (1) ancient people believed that a deity was “guaranteed” to be present in an idol, and that an idol served as a “conduit” through which people could actually interact with the deity; (2) a deity could do anything but eat on its own, which meant that a person could receive blessings from a deity by placing food before the deity’s idol; (3) since food is all that is required, one need not engage in other practices or obligations, such as ethical behavior; (4) idolatry can be practiced anywhere and at any time; (5) idolatry was the common practice, and its legitimacy seemed certain, as the Canaanites themselves thrived in the Land before Israel arrived; (6) it seems more logical that many gods would be in charge of the various aspects of creation, rather than one God¹⁸⁸; (7) idolatry could be an aesthetic and interactive experience, appealing to the senses; (8) idolatry encouraged gluttony, because each time meat was consumed, part of it would be sacrificed to the idol, part to the priest involved, and part to the family—thus, the more one sacrificed meat, the more one would be blessed; (9) idolatry involved “sympathetic magic,” most dramatically resulting in the belief that sex between an individual and a temple prostitute on earth would encourage

Motyer similarly states that the second commandment directs Christians to think of God in only “spiritual, non-physical terms,” and to worship God without recourse to “visible representations” (217-218).

¹⁸⁷ Stuart, 450.

¹⁸⁸ It was a common belief in the biblical era that one should have three kinds of gods: a national god, a family god, and a personal god. For many Israelites, this made sense, and they often thought of God as the national god, Baal as the family god (see Judg 2:13; 6:25, 28, 30-32; 1 Kgs 16:31-32), and Dagon as the personal god (see Judg 16:24; 1 Samuel 5; 1 Chron 10:10).

sex between gods and goddesses, which would result in fertility on earth, among plants and animals.¹⁸⁹

In analyzing Stuart's view that the prohibition in the second commandment goes beyond idolatry to include *any* artwork in veneration practices, it would seem this position may be influenced, in part, by his Reformed background, which often prohibit or discourage the use of images in veneration practices or worship settings. To arrive at his interpretation, Stuart again takes primarily a grammatical approach. Stuart also engages in a historical investigation, but this is primarily for the purpose of illuminating the original practice of idolatry in the biblical world, something he argues is frequently missed by a modern reader.

Turning to vv. 5b-6, Stuart argues that its motive clause indicates how much God cares about this prohibition, primarily because the breaking of this commandment can have a lasting negative effect on one's descendants. The language is intentionally "repetitive and inclusive," to reinforce the fact that there is "no exception of any kind to the ban on idolatry." The motive clause is often misunderstood to mean that God will punish innocent children for the sins of their ancestors. Indeed, Deut 24:16 explicitly speaks against punishing innocent children for the sins of their ancestors. The actual

¹⁸⁹ Stuart, 450-454. For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 102; Ashby, 88-89; Bailey, 219; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 40-41; Dozeman, 482-486; Harman, 215; J. Janzen, 143-144; W. Janzen, 254-257; Mackay, 344; Page, 82; Roper, 323-324; Ryken, 535-536; Scarlata, 160; Wiersbe, 109.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Ashby emphasizes that the commandment is designed to prevent Israel from trying to use an idol to influence, control, or limit God in any way. Ashby also notes that the idol often takes on the characteristics of the deity it represents. For example, Baal's idol was a bull, which conveys a sense of strength, prowess, and fertility. Similarly, Ryken argues that one violates the commandment when one tries to shape God in one's own image or promote a theology that one prefers, rather than allow God to be God. Alexander states that one of the reasons why God forbids images and chooses the tabernacle for God's dwelling place is that this limits access to God, and sets the conditions for access on God's own terms.

meaning of the clause¹⁹⁰ is that God will only punish those people who learn and perpetuate the sins of their ancestors. These people will receive the same punishments as their ancestors. In other words, learning a sin from a parent or ancestor is no excuse for exemption from punishment. However, the severity of the punishment must be contrasted with God's "real wish," which is to provide blessings for those who keep the commandment. The contrast in numbers is meant to drive the point: the third and fourth generation (which is idiomatic for "plenty of" people¹⁹¹) will be punished, while thousands of generations will be blessed. Stuart makes clear that "love" and "hate" in the motive clause are not emotive terms, but idioms for loyalty and disloyalty.¹⁹²

The motive clause in Exod 20:5-6 garners significant attention from Stuart, because it touches on two issues of particular concern for evangelicals: (1) the possibility that the clause supports the punishment of innocent people, which is against the belief of the vast majority of evangelicals; and (2) the possibility that the clause supports a common evangelical theology that presents God in the OT as a God of wrath, while God in the NT is a God of love.¹⁹³ Stuart counters the first possibility by employing a canonical approach and turning to Deut 24:16. He counters the second issue by

¹⁹⁰ Stuart notes its frequency in other places: e.g., Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; Jer 32:18.

¹⁹¹ Stuart cites Am 1:3, 6, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; Prov 30:15, 18, 21, 29 as examples of this.

¹⁹² For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 220; Currid, 40; Mackay, 346-347; Roper, 326-327; Scarlata, 161. Roper agrees with Stuart's interpretation of v. 6. On Roper's interpretation of v. 5, see footnote 327.

¹⁹³ This belief can be traced at least as far back as Marcion (85-160 CE), who argued that two Gods exist in the Bible: the God of the OT, who was a demiurge and was bent on vengeance and justice without mercy, and the God of the NT, the Heavenly Father who gave birth to Jesus, and was a God of love and forgiveness. While evangelicals today would likely not support the existence of a demiurge, a good number still subscribe to the belief that there is a discrepancy between the OT and the NT: in the OT, one encounters a vengeful God bent on justice, while in the NT, one encounters a God of love. E.g., see Goldingay's descriptions of students and their views of God in the OT and NT in "Characteristics," 99-102. See also a similar discussion in Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, "Answers," <https://billygraham.org/answer/why-is-god-characterized-so-differently-in-the-old-testament-vs-the-new-testament/> (accessed November 10, 2019).

emphasizing the second part of the motive clause. In this way, Stuart is able to filter the commandment through a three-stage approach to show that God is consistently a God of love, from the OT to the NT, and into the present—enacting punishment only when people perpetuate the sins of their ancestors.

2.2.6 Third Commandment: Exod 20:7

Beginning with the third commandment, Stuart notes, God switches from the first to the third person. This is a stylistic choice, seen elsewhere in the OT, especially the prophets. Like the previous commandment, the third commandment includes a motive clause, although it does not provide a specific punishment.¹⁹⁴ All that it states is that God will not יִקָּח (hold guiltless) the person who violates the commandment.¹⁹⁵ The nonspecific punishment “indicates the far more general and ominous danger of being held guilty by God, who may choose any way he desires to protect the holiness of his name from misuse.”¹⁹⁶

The phrase לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה can be literally translated “raise up Yahweh’s name for no good.”¹⁹⁷ One would raise up Yahweh’s name as “a guarantor of one’s words,” such as in giving a promise or providing testimony. One might invoke Yahweh’s name to ensure that one remains true to what one says. Thus, the commandment is about

¹⁹⁴ For similar interpretations, see W. Janzen, 258; Mackay, 348; Motyer, 224-225. For Motyer, the vagueness makes the motivation clause “all the more frightening,” adding that the purpose of the motivation clause is to show “that the Lord’s name is intensely precious to him. It is he who notes its misuse and who matches the punishment to the crime in each and every case” (225).

¹⁹⁵ The term appears eighteen times in the OT and seems to have the same meaning almost every time. Other possible translations include “clear the guilty,” “declare innocent,” and “acquit.”

¹⁹⁶ Stuart, 454-455 and n. 37. Stuart points out severe examples of punishments in Jeremiah, in which God claims people’s lives for misusing God’s name. See Jer 14:14-16; 27:15; 29:21. For a similar interpretation, see Ryken, 540-541.

¹⁹⁷ Stuart, 455.

preventing perjury.¹⁹⁸ Following Herbert Huffmon, Stuart points out, though, that the commandment is intentionally ambiguous: all misuses of God's name are included, not just perjury.¹⁹⁹ The phrase לְרָעָה is better translated as “for a bad purpose”; thus, the commandment is saying, “You shall not raise up Yahweh's name for a bad purpose.”²⁰⁰ Examples of using God's name for a bad purpose range from “making light of it or overtly mocking it, to speaking about Yahweh in any way disrespectfully, to using it as the theophoric element²⁰¹ in a personal name under social pressure to have one's family ‘look orthodox’ when in fact their beliefs were pagan/idolatrous.”²⁰² A name in the ancient world signified a person's reputation, or his/her “essence.” Thus, when one invokes God's name, one should not take that invocation lightly.²⁰³ Stuart argues that

¹⁹⁸ Stuart bolsters his interpretation with a parallel found in a stele by Neferabu, from the Nineteenth Dynasty (c. 1320 BCE, close to the time of the Sinai event). In this text, Neferabu has “sworn falsely by Ptah, the lord of Maat” and as a result has gone blind (Stuart, 455, n. 39).

For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 43. Carpenter states that perjury is certainly in view, but the commandment refers to other kinds of misuses, as well.

¹⁹⁹ Herbert Bardwell Huffmon, “The Fundamental Code Illustrated: The Third Commandment,” in *Pomegranates and Bolden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. D. P. Wright, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 364. Stuart notes that Huffmon excludes magical practices from the intention of the third commandment.

²⁰⁰ Stuart, 455-456 and n. 41. Stuart cites Deut 5:11; Jer 2:30; 4:30; 6:29; 18:15; 47:11; Pss 24:4; 149:20 as supporting his translation.

²⁰¹ This kind of name, Stuart states, usually contains a shortened form of “Yahweh” (e.g., “yah,” “yahu,” “yeho,” or “yo”). See Stuart, 456, n. 42.

²⁰² Stuart, 455-456. For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 221; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 29, n. 126-127, 43-44; Currid, 41; Garrett, 470, n. 3; 476-477; Gilbert and Stallman, 46-47; Gowan, 88; Hamilton, 335-336; W. Janzen, 258; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Larsson, 145; Motyer, 218, 224-225; Page, 85; Pokrifka, 222-223; Roper, 327; Ryken, 539-541, 544-546; Scarlata, 162.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. For Pokrifka, misuse of God's name can also include referring to idols with God's name (e.g., Exod 32:4; 1 Kgs 12:28). W. Janzen believes we must take the commandment more generally as a prohibition on the misuse of God's name because we are too distant from the original context to know what the commandment originally meant. In Johnstone's view, when one uses God's name incorrectly, one fails to consider the seriousness that is involved in invoking God in a given situation. Ryken includes using God to promote certain political positions and worshipping God insincerely. Mackay states that the commandment has to do with attempting to manipulate God by giving the appearance of one's personal, selfish motives as actually God's will. Gilbert and Stallman argue that disrespecting other people's names or calling them names falls under the purview of the commandment (see Matt 5:22).

²⁰³ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 90; Bruckner, 184; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 43; Coggins, 79; Currid, 41; Dozeman, 486-488; W. Janzen, 258; Mackay, 348; Motyer, 224; Page, 85; Ryken, 538-539; Wiersbe, 110-111.

Jesus “reinforced and clarified” the commandment by stating that nothing could be invoked when making an oath. In effect, only one’s word could be one’s bond.²⁰⁴

Stuart’s interpretation engages in a three-stage process. In stage one, he begins with a historical investigation. From it, he concludes that the original intention of the commandment was to protect God’s name in oath making. Stuart then uses a grammatical approach, centering his attention on אִשְׁוֹר, to argue for a more expansive application of the commandment. In stage two, Stuart points to Jesus’ reinforcement and clarification of the commandment in the NT to argue that nothing can be invoked when making an oath. All of this sets Stuart up in stage three to argue that the commandment bars *any* improper use of God’s name and any oath-making of any kind. As we will see, an interpretive move to expand the commandment’s prohibition is common among the commentators. It is due partly to denominational influence, and partly to the commentators’ exegetical stance toward the Decalogue, seeing it as a constitution, from which specific laws can be applied (see footnote 157). Thus, the semantic range of words like אִשְׁוֹר are analyzed thoroughly. The result is that even though the commandment might have only been understood and applied in one particular way in its original context, this does not restrict it from other possible applications throughout the rest of the OT and NT.

²⁰⁴ Stuart, 455-457. Stuart cites Matt 5:33-37; 23:16-22 here. He gives a caveat that this does not include giving oaths in court that invoke God’s name (e.g., “so help me God”). See Stuart, 456, n. 42. However, he does not clarify how this is different in kind from the types of oaths that Jesus bans.

2.2.7 Fourth Commandment: Exod 20:8-11

Even though the fourth commandment is the longest in the Decalogue, Stuart argues this should not be taken to mean it is the most important.²⁰⁵ Rather, the length is necessary because the commandment requires more explanation than the others. Stuart does identify a special significance to/for the commandment, however. As Exod 31:13, 17 states, the Sabbath is to be a sign of the Sinai covenant. The function of this sign is to visibly remind people of the covenant, so that they never forget it.²⁰⁶ Every seventh day, when the Sabbath comes and the people end their work, they receive this reminder. In the New Covenant, regular times of worship of Christ serve the same purpose: worship is a sign of one's membership in the New Covenant. When one participates in it, one is reminded of the New Covenant.²⁰⁷

The twin elements of the Sabbath are “stopping” and “keeping holy.” Both are intimately linked: all people are to stop work, so that they can concentrate on worship of God. The word שבת does not strictly mean “rest.” Rather, it means a cessation, whether or not one needs it or deserves it, so that one might concentrate on worship of God.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵ For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44-46; Page, 86-87. According to Page, the Sabbath is the “center around which Israel’s communal identity and foundational theology are built” (86). It brings together the creation of the world and the creation of Israel as a community. God rested at the end of creation, and Israel rests at Sinai, as it receives God’s revelation. The Sabbath communicates that the Lord “creates, redeems, and sanctifies” (87). Carpenter states that when Israel practices the Sabbath, the image of God is restored in God’s people. Observing the Sabbath indicates that Israel is God’s people, created anew. This command is so serious that without it, the people could not actually be his people. The Sabbath is what “establishes” Israel “as his new moral, ethical, religious people” (46). Carpenter adds that the people need one day a week to focus on God; otherwise, they would come to eventually neglect “their spiritual and religious sensitivities to Yahweh, their God. The divine awareness in their lives would have been snuffed out (cf. Luke 8:14 [46]).”

²⁰⁶ Stuart points to other instances in which signs are given for covenants: the rainbow with Noah (Gen 9:12-13, 17), and circumcision with Abraham (Gen 17:11).

For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 43; Scarlata, 164.

²⁰⁷ Stuart, 457.

²⁰⁸ Stuart, 457-458 and n. 48. For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 43. See also Bailey, 222; Bruckner, 185; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 332.

The word זָכוֹר (remember) is an infinitive absolute, carrying an imperative force. There are two possible translations for זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ. One is “remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy” (a more traditional rendering), while the other is “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (NIV).²⁰⁹ The former lends itself to the interpretation that one remembers the Sabbath day so that one can then keep it holy, while the latter suggests that when one keeps the Sabbath holy, one is remembering it. Both are possible, but Stuart prefers the former, as the parts of the commandment that follow work better with this interpretation.²¹⁰

For Exod 20:9-10, Stuart prefers the following translation: “Six days you may work and do all your laboring, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you must not do any laboring—you, or your son, or your daughter, your male worker, or your female worker, or your animals, or the resident alien who is inside your gates.”²¹¹ What is intended here is ensuring the seventh day is distinct from the other six. This is accomplished by not doing any work that one would do the other six days, so long as no one or thing is placed into harm.²¹² Based on this principle, “the preparing of food, or the feeding or watering of animals, or anything else necessary to get through the day in an agrarian culture,”²¹³ and activities of priests at the sanctuary could still be done.²¹⁴ How this work is to be divided is not specified. What *is* specified is that this work is not to be given solely to foreigners, or hired hands, or children. The fact that the

²⁰⁹ Stuart, 458. Pokrifka supports the second translation. See Pokrifka, 224.

²¹⁰ Stuart, 458. For a similar interpretation, see Harman, 216-217.

²¹¹ Stuart, 458-459.

²¹² For similar interpretations, see Harman, 217; Mackay, 348; Ryken, 552.

²¹³ Stuart, 459.

²¹⁴ See also Bruckner, 186. Bruckner states that rest, in Jesus’ understanding, means rest from ailments. That is precisely what Jesus enabled others to do: he healed their wounds on the Sabbath so that they could partake in the Sabbath rest.

commandment prohibits work for all of these groups of people reveals that the commandment has in mind equal rest for everyone.²¹⁵

Jesus clarifies the commandment in the NT by stating that the purpose of the commandment is to give people a rest. Thus, pursuing recreational activities is acceptable.²¹⁶ Paul further clarifies the commandment by stating that any day could be a day of rest, not just the seventh. The real intent is that one day be chosen.²¹⁷ How one observes the commandment today would involve a shift in one's routine, so that the Sabbath remains distinct. This, however, does not mean anything that is not part of one's weekly routine can be done. Rather, a day must be devoted to God. Whatever one chooses to do, the goal is to love God, to do specifically God's will one day a week; that is, "to worship, learn, study, care, and strengthen the spirit."²¹⁸

The rationale clause in Exodus provides the supreme example and precedent for the Sabbath with God's creation of the world. No person has an excuse to forego the Sabbath, since God—who needs no rest—"took the Sabbath."²¹⁹ God "blessed the

²¹⁵ Stuart, 458-459. Stuart observes that some interpreters have tried to limit the meaning of "alien within your gates." For example, a rabbinic interpretation sees this as a convert to Judaism. Stuart turns to H. R. Cole, "The Sabbath and the Alien," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38:2 (2000): 223-29 for the rabbinic interpretation. For Stuart, this seems to go against the actual intent of the commandment, which is to give rest to everyone, not just those in the covenant. See also Garrett 471, n. 5; Mackay, 350. Garrett states that the definition of a resident alien is someone who is not owned, but can be hired for work. By including the resident alien, the implication of the commandment is that no one can do work, not even a hired hand on one's behalf. Mackay believes the resident alien was not presumed to be a follower of Yahweh. The gate was the "area just within the entrance to an ancient city which was the focus of its administrative and commercial life" (350). Any resident alien within the gate was to follow the commandment.

²¹⁶ See Matt 12:1-12; Lk 13:10-16; Jn 7:22-23.

²¹⁷ See Rom 14:5 and Col 2:16.

²¹⁸ Stuart, 459-460 and n. 52. Quotation from Stuart, 460. The day may involve some type of service to others (so long as it would not leave one exhausted by the end of the day).

For similar interpretations, see Currid, 44; Gilbert and Stallman, 51-52; Harman, 217; Mackay, 348-349; Page, 86; Ryken, 551-552, 560.

²¹⁹ For a similar interpretation, see Hamilton, 337-340. Hamilton then reasons that if God took a break, even though God does not "grow tired or weary" (Isa 40:28) should not God's people?

Sabbath day and made it holy” (Gen 2:3).²²⁰ This means that the Sabbath is foremost a spiritual day, one filled with blessing and holiness. A person engages in the Sabbath so that they might become “spiritually stronger and closer to God.”²²¹ If doing this helps one recharge physically as well, that is an added benefit, not the primary intent of the day.²²² Following Y. Endo, Stuart argues that the rationale clause of the Exodus Decalogue has no real difference from the Deuteronomy version that invokes instead the Exodus. Both of them operate in the same way and hold the same requirements. The reason for the difference is the distinct circumstances in which they are given. The Exodus version was revealed when the covenant was established, while the Deuteronomy version was given as part of a renewal of the covenant with a new generation.²²³

Stuart’s interpretation of the fourth commandment again follows his standard three-stage approach. He begins with a grammatical and historical study of the text to discern the Sabbath’s meaning and significance in its original context. He then turns to Jesus and Paul’s “clarifications” of the Sabbath commandment in the NT. These reveal

²²⁰ Stuart, 460. For similar interpretations, see Harman, 219; Ryken, 554. Ryken writes that the Sabbath is particularly significant, because it was the first thing God blessed. That blessing is on a day of rest, which God desires to share with humanity.

²²¹ Stuart, 460.

²²² Stuart, 460.

²²³ Stuart, 457, n. 45. See Y. Endo, “The Sabbath Law on Mount Sinai and the Plains of Moab,” *Exegetica* 6 (1995): 59-75. Stuart notes the Documentary Hypothesis, and how Exod 20:8-11 and Genesis 1 may have been produced by the same Priestly author. Stuart, though, argues that the Pentateuch was written by Moses (a claim many evangelical commentators do not make), and that the unified themes are the result of this single author. However, Stuart also argues that Genesis 1 and Exod 20:8-11 should not be taken as evidence that the world was made in six days. See Stuart, 460, n. 55-57.

For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35. Johnstone quotes Rashi in his explanation of the discrepancies: Both versions of the Decalogue were said at the same time, as Ps 62:12 attests to: “One thing God has spoken; two things have I heard.” The meaning behind this is that God is beyond human communication. As a result, God’s speech is understood by humans in numerous ways. Humans will never fully grasp God; thus, the ways in which humans will hear God’s speech will be endless. It follows, then, that when one encounters discrepancies in the Sabbath commandment—and all other biblical texts, for that matter—one should resist harmonizing them. To do that would be to suppress the dialogue and debate that are occurring within the Bible. The key here is that both accounts are true. To harmonize them would be to not only suppress the truth, but to imply that the accounts are not in fact truthful as they stand.

that contemporary Christians can choose any day as the Sabbath, but whichever day they choose, they must practice rest and worship on that day. Stuart's view of the Sabbath is one of several common Protestant positions and seems to be influenced to a degree by Stuart's Reformed background: emphasizing the necessity of observing the Sabbath and devoting one day of the week to God (we will see other interpretations of the Sabbath below). Stuart ends his comment on the fourth commandment by employing a canonical approach, addressing a possible contradiction between Exodus and Deuteronomy's rationale clause. His parsing of the different contexts of Exodus and Deuteronomy precludes any need to engage in historical criticism.

2.3 TERENCE FRETHEIM

Terence Fretheim is a professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary. Fretheim's commentary is part of the *Interpretation* series. According to the preface of the series, its goal is to bring together the latest historical and theological research about the biblical text in an expository commentary, looking both to its original meaning and its implications for today. Unlike other expository commentaries like Stuart's, which move verse by verse, the *Interpretation* series focuses on whole passages, presenting the content in the form of essays.²²⁴ Aside from being a stylistic choice, section-by-section expository commentaries, as Fretheim's will show, tend to emphasize the reception of the biblical text in the NT and contemporary application over historical investigation.

²²⁴ Fretheim, v-vi.

2.3.1 The Purpose of the Law

For Fretheim, the fact that Israel was delivered from slavery before it was given the Law is extremely important. It is not obedience to the Law that earns freedom. Rather, the Law is a gift, which is given to an Israel that has been redeemed already.²²⁵ The story of Exodus already begins with Israel as God's people (Exod 3:7). These people are the descendants of Abraham, the one with whom God first made the covenant; thus, as descendants of Abraham, the Israelites are the rightful heirs of this covenant. The story of Exodus, in this light, is the story of "how these people more and more take on their identity, becoming in life what they already are in the eyes of God."²²⁶ The law is the next stage in that process. The purpose of the Law is to help Israel remain faithful to God.²²⁷ Once given, the Law must be obeyed in order for certain things to happen. Notably, obedience to the law ensures that Israel will remain in the land (Deut 4:40); in addition, obedience to the law is a way of "witnessing" to the world who God is.²²⁸

²²⁵ Fretheim cites Deut 4:40. For a similar interpretation, see Pokrifka, 216.

²²⁶ Fretheim, 22.

²²⁷ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 2, 80; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 34; Enns, 387-389; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 195-201, 397-410; Pokrifka, 206; Ryken, 457-458. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. According to Enns, the covenant referred to in Exod 19:5 is not a new covenant God is establishing, constructed around laws, but the same covenant God made with Abraham hundreds of years before. This means that the law does not begin a new relationship, but elevates it in ways it had not been before. That deeper relationship and high calling entail Israel becoming a "treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation." Enns' description of these terms is similar to Stuart's above. See p. 54. Johnstone argues that the offer of a covenant was written by D. This is in contrast to P, which already imagines the covenant as being established with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For P, what Israel lacks before the encounter at Sinai is Torah, the means to understand that they are already in a covenant with God (cf. Exod 15:26a). If Israel keeps these, it will "be" God's treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Israel, however, is already God's "firstborn." That is a fact that will remain, regardless of how Israel acts. The verb, Johnstone states, in Exod 19:6 is significant: **יְהִי**. The verb does not mean "become," but "be." The significance is that if Israel breaks the covenant in any way, Israel will face punishment. If the verb were "become," then the result would be "annihilation." Israel will no longer exist. But since the verb is "be," out of grace, God will restore Israel if it breaks the covenant, as seen in the golden calf story.

²²⁸ Fretheim, 21-22.

There is a fundamentally important connection that must be maintained between Law and narrative. The Decalogue and the narrative of Exodus 19 are interdependent,²²⁹ with ten points of connection:

(1) God is the “subject” of both, and both reveal God in a particular way: “the law fleshes out the word of God as speech; the narrative fills out the word of God as event”²³⁰;

(2) the story helps establish that the law is a gift, graciously given so that the people know how to be “a community of faith”;

(3) the narrative prevents any accusation of legalism, showing that the law helps build a relationship between God and the people;

(4) the law shows that God’s actions call for a response from the people. In outlining what that response should be, it in effect shows that the people have a role in helping God to redeem the world;

(5) the law demonstrates that creation is ongoing, not just at the cosmic level, but at the social level, too, where, through law, God helps create a just society;

(6) the law reveals more clearly how to imitate God’s actions in the world. In this sense, it is “an exegesis of the divine action of the narrative”²³¹ (likewise, God’s actions help show the proper interpretation of the law)²³²;

(7) the narrative expresses the impetus of the law. It motivates one to act “justly” and “compassionately” toward others by drawing on the past experience of slavery;

²²⁹ Fretheim states that the integration of law into narrative in the OT is unique. It has no parallel in the rest of the ANE.

²³⁰ Fretheim, 201.

²³¹ Fretheim, 205.

²³² For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 14; Scarlata, 148.

(8) the law is revealed not only directly at Sinai, but also indirectly through Israel's experiences and other modes of communication, which means that the laws must change as new situations arise, or new laws must be added;

(9) while the story witnesses to God, following the law is another form of witness to God's nature²³³ and God's actions in history;

(10) the narrative and law are integrated, such that the narrative calls one to certain actions which are spelled out in law, and the law directs one to live a certain way which is spelled out in story. The order of priority is important. The story does not exist for the sake the law, but the other way around: the law exists for the sake of the story.²³⁴

The obedience God calls for today exceeds the laws at Sinai which only provide basic instructions on how to be faithful and remain in relationship with God. When God calls Israel to obey "my voice" (Exod 19:5),²³⁵ it points to a broader "commitment to obey *whatever words God may command over the course of Israel's history*."²³⁶ This is an "*open-ended* commitment to God," a willingness to do "whatever God may have to say at any point in its [Israel's] history."²³⁷ This is done out of a "personal commitment"

²³³ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 104; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 38; Enns, 412-413; Page, 80; Ryken, 485. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Alexander raises several theological points that the Decalogue communicates: (1) God is supreme; (2) God alone is the moral authority; (3) from these two points, God has the right to demand "exclusive obedience" of all creation and anyone he has saved; (4) God also has the right to be jealous when idolatry is practiced; (5) worship of anyone or anything other than God is to claim that God is not supreme. Ryken states that the first commandment (Exod 20:3) reveals God's sovereignty and omnipresence, the second commandment (Exod 20:4-6) his jealousy, spiritual nature, mercy, and justice, the third commandment (Exod 20:7) his honorable nature and holiness, and the fourth commandment (Exod 20:8-11) that he works and rests. To break one of these commandments is to offend God's very nature.

²³⁴ Fretheim, 201-207. For similar interpretations, see Dozeman, 460-464; Hamilton, xxv, 292, 301-305; Ryken, 496-497; Scarlata, 149. Dozeman speculates that it may very well be that the legal codes in the Hebrew Bible were fashioned as commentary for the narratives.

²³⁵ Contrary to what some scholars hold, Fretheim rejects the view that the Sinai covenant is modeled on an ancient treaty form, though he does believe Deuteronomy played some influence in its construction. However, he does not specify in which ways.

²³⁶ Fretheim, 211-212.

²³⁷ Fretheim, 212.

to God.²³⁸ Israel keeps the law, not for the sake of the law, but because Israel has a personal relationship with God, and wishes to keep God as its focus. God states that if Israel follows the law (and everything else God's voice will reveal), then Israel will be God's own possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Failure to follow the law does not mean divine rejection. Israel is and will remain God's elect. Rather, failure to follow the law means that Israel would not become the people God intends and would not be able to execute God's will in the world. Thus, following the law is not for Israel's own sake, but for the world's. This is what it means to be a priest. At this point, Fretheim jumps immediately to parallel texts in the NT and contemporary application. He states that the calling God initiates at Sinai is now continued with the church, which remains "in continuity with Israel."²³⁹ As 1 Pet 2:9 states, the church is to be God's chosen race, royal priesthood, and holy nation—and heed the calling first given at Sinai.²⁴⁰

One can see in Fretheim's interpretation a three-stage process. In stage one, Fretheim uses a canonical approach, and articulates far more thoroughly than Stuart the crucial point that the election and deliverance of Israel from Egypt occurred before the giving of the Law. In other words, God chose and delivered Israel, not because of anything Israel had done. One can see an emphasis on *sola gratia* in this interpretation, reiterated when Fretheim states that Israel will remain God's people, even if it fails. This may express the influence of Fretheim's Lutheran background. Fretheim also seems to

²³⁸ An example of this dynamic process would be Deuteronomy and its articulation of new laws and new ways of practicing the laws given at Sinai.

²³⁹ Fretheim, 214.

²⁴⁰ Fretheim, 210-214. References to the church's mission as a continuation of the call made in the OT include Lk 24:45-47; Acts 13:47; 15:14-18; Rom 15:8-12; Gal 3:8-9. Fretheim notably does not discuss the fate of Israel after the biblical period, particularly rabbinic Judaism. For more on this topic, see p. 5ff.

For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 219; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 15; Coggins, 72-73; Currid, 19; Enns, 396-399; Harman, 203; Pokrifka, 208-209; Roper, 315, 317; Ryken, 461; Wendland, 11; Wiersbe, 104-105.

have adopted a position akin to covenantal nomism when he discusses positive reasons for the Law—concentrating especially on its role in enabling Israel to be a kingdom of priests (perhaps another Lutheran influence with its promotion of the priesthood of all believers). Fretheim is extremely cautious, however, about how he highlights positive aspects of the Law, in order to avoid any misunderstanding about the Law’s function. In ten points, he argues why the Law can never be separated from narrative. Failure to see the Law’s connection to narrative will inevitably lead to legalism. Notable, as well, is Fretheim’s focus on developing a personal relationship with God, including the desire to listen and follow (i.e., love) God in ways that exceed the Law—concepts that have deep resonances with Protestants, and especially evangelicals. In stage two, Fretheim’s interpretations are filtered through the NT, especially 1 Pet 2:9. As 1 Peter states, the church, like Israel, is God’s chosen race, royal priesthood, and holy nation. This sets Fretheim up to argue in stage three that Sinai is as significant for the church as it is for Israel, and that the church must now continue the mission of Israel.

2.3.2 Introductory Remarks on the Decalogue

Fretheim points out that the Exodus Decalogue has a parallel in Deut 5:6-21, and other similar “decalogue-like formulations.”²⁴¹ Exod 34:1 describes the Decalogue as written on two tablets and Exod 34:28 identifies it as “ten words.”²⁴² The fact that the Exodus version diverges from the Deuteronomy version in various places (most notably the Sabbath commandment) indicates that the law was not meant to be static, but was

²⁴¹ Exod 34:17-26; Deut 27:15-26; Leviticus 19. Fretheim, 220-221.

²⁴² For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 35; Dozeman, 469-474; Wendland, 119.

designed to change over time. It may be that the Decalogue originally had a short form with a series of negative commandments. These commandments were altered and modified as the community's needs changed over time.²⁴³ The ways in which the commandments were modified may indicate that the Decalogue was originally designed for a worship setting at the sanctuary. However, the Decalogue's "simple, direct, easy-to-remember form"²⁴⁴ made it easy to transfer to other contexts in the community.²⁴⁵ The fact that the prophets cite them indicates that they were known and had a place of importance in Israel's history.²⁴⁶ It may be that the Decalogue held a catechetical function, as its style and place in Exodus lend themselves to this end.²⁴⁷

In its present form, the Decalogue is composed of eight negative commandments. These are meant to "open up life rather than close it down,"²⁴⁸ in the sense that they draw the boundaries of a righteous and good life, instead of identifying specific actions that are prohibited. The negative commandments are designed to protect the community, rather than "create" a community.²⁴⁹ The two positive commandments lead one to see the positive side of the negative commandments (e.g., the commandment to not kill leads one

²⁴³ For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Motyer, 475. Motyer cautions that there is no definitive evidence for a short-form Decalogue that was developed over time.

²⁴⁴ Fretheim, 221.

²⁴⁵ For similar interpretations, see J. Janzen, 140-142, 279-280; Motyer, 222-223. Janzen sees a practical function in the Decalogue: the number ten may be a way to recall them with one's fingers. The fingers lead one to consider one's hands, which then reminds one that whatever one does, one should make sure that one is following God's commandments. See also Motyer, 211-213. For Motyer, the number ten conveys a sense of completeness.

²⁴⁶ See Jer 7:9; Hos 4:2.

²⁴⁷ Fretheim, 220-221. See Exod 24:12.

²⁴⁸ Fretheim, 221.

²⁴⁹ For similar interpretations, see Johnstone *Exodus 20-40*, 23; Motyer, 215-216. Johnstone writes that the title "ten words" is highly significant; though, a better translation for "word" might be "organizing principle." Seen in this way, the Decalogue does not "lay down objective duties. Fundamentally, [it] draws out the implications of personal response to the prevenient grace of God" (23). Commandments only appear in v. 8 and 12. The rest are prohibitions. The difference between the two is that the former is more "restrictive," giving no other option than what it commands, while the latter "set[s] the boundaries for freedom of action" (23). It only states what cannot be done. One is then free to respond to God's grace in a multiplicity of ways.

to think about how to protect others).²⁵⁰ All of the commandments are apodictic, and contain consequences that God alone is to enact. Thus, one should be motivated not out of concern for how one will be treated by society, but out of concern for God.²⁵¹

As a whole, the commandments are designed to be comprehensive, covering relations with God, fellow human beings, and creation itself.²⁵² By modern standards, there seem to be aspects of life missing, such as self-care or corporate ethics. Some try to see in each commandment the ability to speak to all aspects of modern life. But to put it bluntly, the Decalogue was written for a different time, and does not conceive of every possibility in the future. This fact should prevent one from thinking the commandments are too limited on the one hand, or definitive ethical principles for all times on the other. Rather, the two versions of the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy show that development is necessary and intended.²⁵³

The NT makes clear that the Decalogue is still incumbent on Christians. Jesus in Matt 5:17-29 shows that the commandments should be “pushed to their deepest level in

²⁵⁰ For similar interpretations, see Currid, 37; Hamilton, 321; Roper, 321; Ryken, 508-509; Scarlata, 159.

²⁵¹ Fretheim, 221.

²⁵² For similar interpretations, see W. Janzen, 254; Roper, 341.

²⁵³ Fretheim, 221-223. Fretheim’s comments suggest that the distinction between apodictic and casuistic laws is not absolute, as the former is representative and suggestive, rather than closed and finished.

For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 101, 104-105; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 1-5, 41-45; Pokrifka, 44. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. For Pokrifka, the “ultimate” development of the law comes with the new covenant. Johnstone notes that criticisms have been launched against the Decalogue’s limitations. It seems to address only wealthy individuals who own land, while ignoring the poor and other members of society. But if one keeps in mind it was written and intended to be one code among many, one can see why it has a limited focus. In this way, the Covenant Code serves as an approved explanation of it. Moreover, one should keep in mind its purpose: an ideal vision of what life could be after the exile. According to Alexander, Jesus understood the Decalogue as signposts or principles, not laws (cf. Matt 5:21-22).

For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Currid, 35. In Currid’s understanding, the number “ten” symbolizes, in Hebrew, a sense of completeness. That means “no additions are allowed. Also, the stone tablets were written on both sides, covering them completely, leaving no room for additions (Exod 32:15 [35]).”

the human spirit.”²⁵⁴ Through the Decalogue, one is taught to discern how to love in all circumstances. The Decalogue also functions to point out ways in which Christians fail to love.²⁵⁵ To be clear, Christ *has* fulfilled the law.²⁵⁶ Consequently, no Christian follows the law in order to be a Christian. Rather, the one who has been redeemed by Christ is now free to “do the works of the law,”²⁵⁷ using the law as a guide for a life of love. When the NT speaks against the law, this is directed at people in the first century who

²⁵⁴ Fretheim, 223. In this vein, Ryken writes, “The Ten Commandments are spiritual; they require inward as well as outward obedience” (508).

²⁵⁵ For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 38, 55; Currid, 35; Gilbert and Stallman, 36-37, 40; Harman, 212; W. Janzen, 279-280; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 1-5; Motyer, 195-201; Pokrifka, 43; Ryken, 487-493, 498-503, 507-508, 512-515; Wendland, 120-121; Wiersbe, 107-108.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Ryken argues that the Decalogue not only motivates people to follow God’s law (especially with the motive clauses), but it also shows people how much they need a savior when they fail to uphold the law. Johnstone believes that the two greatest commandments affirm the Decalogue is authoritative for Christians. Ryken argues that the Decalogue will always be authoritative because it reflects God’s nature, which is unchanging. In addition, the Decalogue has been authoritative since the beginning of time. One can see from Genesis to the giving of the Decalogue in Exodus not only humanity’s knowledge of the Decalogue, but its successes and failures in maintaining it. Ryken states that the Ten Commandments encapsulate the ways in which Christians must act toward God and others. It summarizes perfectly Christian morality. He distinguishes the moral law from two other categories: the civil and ceremonial laws. With the coming of Christ, the civil and ceremonial laws have been superseded. The former was for a physical state that has given way to Christ’s spiritual kingdom, and the latter pointed to Christ, who is the final atoning sacrifice. Ryken states that one way to show that the NT upholds the Decalogue is to point to texts in the NT that support each of the commandments. The first commandment (Exod 20:3) can be found in Jn 14:6, the second (Exod 20:4-6) in 1 Jn 5:21, the third (Exod 20:7) in Matt 6:9, the fourth (Exod 20:8-11) in Col 3:23; Matt 12:8; Heb 4:9.

For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see. Mackay, 323, 340-341; Roper, 340-342; Wendland, 115. For Mackay, Christians are not bound to the law. This means that the Decalogue is not incumbent on Christians. However, this does not mean Christians should ignore the laws of the OT, including the Decalogue. Rather, learning about these laws can teach one about the God who gave them and what this God desires of humanity. Jesus replaces the Decalogue as teacher. Jesus embodies the Decalogue and provides the ultimate model for Christians on how to live.

²⁵⁶ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 84-85; Ryken, 458. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Ryken writes, “Jesus also died for us, for we too are covenant-breakers. But Christ has offered full obedience to God for us, and he has suffered the penalty that we deserved for our sins. God’s covenant is unconditional for us only because Christ has kept its conditions. We have kept the covenant in Christ” (458). For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 12-14. Johnstone understands Christ’s fulfillment somewhat differently: the role of Christ was to obey the law fully, thereby satisfying the law’s need to be fully observed. Once this is accomplished, a person can participate in Christ’s fulfillment of the law (cf. Romans 6-8; 2 Cor 3:6-14). In his view, those who accomplished both had fulfilled the Law by having faith in Christ (cf. Gal 3:17). Johnstone, however, adds that has important insight independent of the NT, which can be used to correct faulty theologies. For example, the law is presented not as the measure by which people are to be punished, but as a means by which people can live well. Johnstone adds that the NT has a high view of the law, but at most, the Law exposes sin and human inability to observe it completely.

²⁵⁷ Fretheim, 223.

erroneously thought the law was the means of their salvation. It was not directed at the OT itself, which holds the same theology of the Law as the NT.²⁵⁸

In Fretheim's introductory remarks about the Decalogue, we see again a three-stage process. In stage one, Fretheim draws on his historical critical analysis to reinforce his view that the Decalogue does not contain the full summation of God's will for God's people. While he would agree with commentators like Stuart that the Decalogue is meant to be comprehensive, Fretheim believes that the Decalogue's own expansion and development through history makes clear that God's will is continually being revealed through history—in ways that exceed the Decalogue. In stage two, Fretheim argues that the NT (especially Matt 5:17-29) makes clear that the Decalogue still plays a vital role in Christianity, which is a common Lutheran view. This enables Fretheim in stage three to promote the utility of the Decalogue, while simultaneously preventing too much reliance on it, which could lead to legalism. Together, this creates a message for contemporary Christians that the ultimate aim of the Law is to facilitate love of God and others. This message is then reinforced in Fretheim's exegesis of Exod 20:2 (below). Fretheim's discussion of the NT also underscores an unequivocal continuity between the OT and NT's theology of Law. This has strong resonances with the New Perspective, though no specific reference to the New Perspective is made, and also bolsters Fretheim's previous argument about the church's continuity with Israel.

²⁵⁸ Fretheim, 223. For a similar interpretation, see Motyer, 195-201.

2.3.3 The Prologue: Exod 20:2

Fretheim states that Exod 20:2 indicates that the Decalogue comes directly from God to Israel. No other law code in the OT is given in this way, which underscores the importance of the Decalogue.²⁵⁹ The direct address to Israel also shows that God seeks to maintain a personal relationship with Israel.²⁶⁰ The law is in service to that, not the other way around. The phrase “I am the Lord your God”²⁶¹ conveys that God promises to be Israel’s God, and the phrase “who brought you out of Egypt” conveys that the commandments do not make Israel a slave to God. Rather, they communicate the ways in which Israel can live a redeemed life with God.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 101-102; Ashby, 84; Bruckner, 181; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32-33; Coggins, 77-78; Gowan, 180; Pokrifka, 215; Wiersbe, 108-109. See also Gowan, 182-183. Gowan considers the topic from a comparative perspective, pointing out that while other societies in the ANE understood their rulers as having been granted the divine right to produce and promulgate laws (e.g., Code of Hammurabi), Israel understood its laws as coming directly from God alone.

²⁶⁰ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 102; Currid, 35; Gowan, 175-177, 182-183, 187; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 24-27; Larsson, 141; Page, 80; Ryken, 484-485. Johnstone adds that the two names—Yahweh and God—brings together God’s intimate, covenantal name with God’s transcendent name. This section also makes known that God is the God of history, the God of the ancestors, but also the God of the present—“your God” whom you came to know through the exodus events.

²⁶¹ See Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 27, n. 113.

²⁶² Fretheim, 223-224. For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 88; J. Janzen, 132-136 142-143; W. Janzen, 26, 237-239, 250; Motyer, 195-201, 213, n. 2, 214-215, 220-221, n. 17. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Motyer writes that the law does not enslave, but was given so that Israel would not be enslaved again. Thus, it teaches liberty: how to live a life of freedom. In fact, a better translation for law is “teaching,” as the word Torah itself comes from ירה (“to teach”). It is the teaching that a parent gives to a child. It is appropriate, then, that one’s attitude toward the law should be positive, as Ps 119:97 states, “Oh how I love your law!” Motyer argues that Christians need to recover this kind of attitude toward the Law: Christians need to embrace the fact that the law plays a positive force in a Christian’s life. The Law is a grace from God that shows people how to live in the world. Moreover, the Law shows how to please God. Motyer then argues that the NT and OT *both* have law and grace. One might argue that Hebrews renders the Law as obsolete. To the contrary, Motyer argues that the new covenant that Hebrews speaks of does not abolish the Law (see Heb 8:7-13; 10:10-18). That would mean that God decreases his expectations when people fail. In actuality, God improves people by writing the Law on their hearts (see Jer 31:33). In other words, God gives the people a new self, designed to follow the law. This does not mean all commandments are still in force. For example, Christ fulfills all sacrifices on the cross. Christ also relinquishes Christians from the dietary laws. What it does mean is that the laws spelled out in the Decalogue are still in force.

Ashby stresses that Yahweh offers Israel the choice to accept or reject Yahweh’s offer of the covenant.

Similar to Stuart, Fretheim uses most of his commentary on Exod 20:2 to recapitulate his introductory remarks about the Law and Decalogue (summarized in sections 2.3.1-2.3.2 above). As noted with Stuart, Exod 20:2 is used as an opportunity to reinforce and prove that Fretheim's understanding of the Law and Decalogue is present in the biblical text, and is therefore correct.

2.3.4 First Commandment, Part I: Exod 20:3

Similar to Stuart, Fretheim begins his interpretation of Exod 20:3 by turning to the henotheism vs. monotheism debate. He also identifies the same phrase, *עַל־פָּנַי* ("before me"), noting the difficulty in translating it. However, rather than spending too much time on the issue, Fretheim states that the meaning of *עַל־פָּנַי* is clear: one must have exclusive devotion to God alone.²⁶³ In addition, he differs from Stuart in stating that the debate on whether the commandment affirms henotheism or monotheism is a legitimate historical question; it may be the case that, at one point, the Israelites were henotheistic. However, the import for today is that the commandment does support monotheism, even if it originally was designed for a henotheistic theology. The wording in Deut 6:5 frames the same commandment in a positive way: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." In determining the contemporary significance of the commandment, Fretheim

J. Janzen states that the covenant calls both God and Israel to enter into it on their own accord, without coercions. One of the mysteries of God is that our actions can be our choice, and yet be God's gift to us. This is akin to a parent who is able to get a child to do something the child thinks he/she at first does not want to do. J. Janzen adds that the law, in this way, is designed to help us live a successful life. If one misses this point, one is prone to understand the God of the NT as a God of love and grace, while the God of the OT is a God of fear and wrath. Though Exodus does not explicitly cite God's love as God's motivation to redeem Israel, Deuteronomy makes clear this is God's motivation (see Deut 7:7, 13; 10:15).

²⁶³ See also Exod 22:20; 23:13; 34:14. See also Mackay, 342-343; Ryken, 519-520. Ryken states that the sense behind the phrase *עַל־פָּנַי*, is that one is not to worship other gods in the place one worships God. But since God is everywhere, the commandment prohibits worship of other gods in any place.

turns to Luther's *Small Catechism*: the first commandment directs one to "fear, love, and trust in God above all things."²⁶⁴ This commandment is the most important and the foundation for all of the other commandments, which spell out the ways in which one is to express one's devotion to God.²⁶⁵

In this interpretation, Fretheim shows that he values critical and grammatical study of the Bible, but for him, the far more important issue is stage three, discerning the meaning of the text for the present. As noted in the introduction, section-by-section expository commentaries tend to pay less attention to historical and grammatical issues than verse-by-verse expository commentaries. These issues *are* entertained, but only to the extent that they facilitate contemporary application. As a point of comparison, while Stuart spends his whole comment on the historical question of henotheism, Fretheim notes its importance, and then moves to contemporary application. Interestingly, Fretheim is much more comfortable with the possibility of a henotheistic Israel than Stuart. In deemphasizing historical inquiry in favor of contemporary application, Fretheim may find less significance in Israel's past. Fretheim's view of the commandment also corresponds well with his thesis that the Law develops over time.

²⁶⁴ Fretheim, 224.

²⁶⁵ Fretheim, 224-225. See also Alexander, 102; Bailey, 219; Currid, 38; Garrett, 474; Gowan, 180; W. Janzen, 254-255; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32; Motyer, 222-223. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Janzen states that the commandment is not a theological statement; its aim is practice, and on that level, it promotes a monotheism that can be lived out. One should be loyal to Yahweh alone. This is the foundation of one's life in God. Alexander adds that the commandment is intentionally broad, so as to include any type of interaction with other gods, not just worship. Bailey states that the commandment itself does not necessarily promote monotheism, nor does it explain why monotheism is true. Rather, its design is such that when one practices the commandment, one will come to realize there is only one God. Garrett adds, "being a monotheist does not mean that one is obedient to this command [to worship Yahweh]. One may falsely believe in one God, as Muslims believe that the one Allah of the Koran is the God of Abraham" (474). Johnstone does not see Exod 20:3 as either confirming or denying the existence of other gods. Johnstone argues that while the existence of other gods is not denied, their power certainly is. For Motyer, the commandment does not necessarily affirm that other gods actually exist, but it does make clear that they can be alluring.

2.3.5 First Commandment, Part II: Exod 20:4-6

This command, Fretheim argues, makes Israel distinct from other nations, all of whom engaged in idolatry. He enters the ongoing debate about whether vv. 4-6 are a separate commandment from v. 3. Those who take it as a separate commandment often see it as forbidding images made of God, with v. 3 implicitly forbidding images made of *other* gods. Based on other passages that deal with this subject,²⁶⁶ Fretheim argues that it is better to take vv. 3 and 4-6 together as one commandment. The plural “them” in v. 5, and also Exod 23:24, indicates that vv. 4-6 have in mind multiple gods, not just Yahweh. Moreover, it makes more sense for Yahweh to be jealous of images of other gods, rather than images of Yahweh’s self. Admittedly, taking vv. 4-6 as part of v. 3 can make it seem like images of Yahweh are not prohibited. One need not be led to this conclusion, though, if one understands images of Yahweh as a form of idolatry.²⁶⁷ Indeed, the story of the golden calf in Exodus 32 can be understood in this way: the calf that the Israelites fashion is supposed to be an image of Yahweh. This is what incites Yahweh’s anger.²⁶⁸

One of the main reasons why idols of other gods were forbidden to Israel was that they were integrated in the religions of other nations, especially the Canaanites, and were part of why these other religions became, at various times, more attractive to the Israelites

²⁶⁶ E.g., Exod 20:23; 23:32-33.

²⁶⁷ For a similar interpretation, see Wendland, 123-124.

²⁶⁸ Fretheim, 225-226. The prohibition on worship of other gods and idols can be found also in 2 Kgs 17:7-18, among other passages. The appearance of this issue throughout the OT indicates the importance of the first commandment.

For similar interpretations, see Scarlata, 161. For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 41; Currid, 39; Garrett, 473; Motyer, 232-233. Garrett argues that v. 3 and vv. 4-6 need to be separate commandments (version 1), because one could violate v. 3 without violating vv. 4-6. Thus, it makes more logical sense to separate the two. Motyer argues that v. 3 prohibits worship of other gods, which includes idols. Assuming the commandments are not repetitive, vv. 4-6 must prohibit images of Yahweh.

than their own. Images of Yahweh in particular were prohibited because they encouraged the worshiper, sometimes subtly and sometimes overtly, to think of God as “static and immobile, deaf and dumb, unfeeling and unthinking.”²⁶⁹ Moreover, they tended to encourage worshipers to identify God’s own character with the image. This was the exact opposite of who Yahweh actually was: a transcendent, dynamic God, able to hear, feel, think, and do what Yahweh wishes. Thus, images of Yahweh were forbidden.²⁷⁰ Since images were insufficient in depicting God accurately, Israel had recourse to words. Unlike physical images, words could convey mental images that were able to capture the dynamic, relational character of God.²⁷¹

Fretheim begins his comment on the commandment by arguing why vv. 3-6 should be taken as one commandment (which is also a Lutheran position). Fretheim takes a grammatical and canonical approach in his argument, focusing especially on the referent of “them” in v. 5, in addition to the relevance of the golden calf pericope from Exodus 32. In keeping with his general interpretive approach, Fretheim pursues historical investigation of this commandment to the extent that it illuminates the importance of the commandment for the contemporary reader. Fretheim’s argument that idolatry had the potential to skew Israel’s understanding of God has clear ramifications for today. The

²⁶⁹ Fretheim, 226. See Ps 115:5-7; Jer 10:4-5; 1 Kgs 18:27-29 on this point.

²⁷⁰ For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 220; Bruckner, 182-183; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 40; Coggins, 78; Currid, 38; Enns, 414-417; Hamilton, 329-334; J. Janzen, 144-146; W. Janzen, 255-257; Larsson, 144; Mackay, 344-345; Motyer, 223-224; Page, 82; Ryken, 531-536.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Mackay adds that the worship of Yahweh is distinct from the other nations. God does not require people to bow down, venerate, worship, or bring sacrifices to a representation of God. Larsson underscores that “God has limited himself in some ways for our benefit” (144). Larsson cites Exod 33:19ff; Deut 4:15ff; Jn 1:1ff. The issue is when we take a limited understanding of God, and forget that it is limited.

²⁷¹ Fretheim, 226-227. On a related note, the reason why Christ takes human form in the incarnation is because only a human form can most accurately convey an invisible God’s image. See Col 1:15.

For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 41; J. Janzen, 144-146; W. Janzen, 256-257; Motyer, 217-218, 223-224, n. 22; Page, 82; Pokrifka, 222.

same danger still exists. Stuart also engages in a historical investigation of this commandment, but his goal centers more on providing background information about idolatrous practices that are experientially distant from today's reader. It may be that, because Lutheran churches often possess comparatively more religious artwork than Reformed churches, the potential to slip into idolatry is more relevant for Fretheim; hence, his more sustained focus on the historical relevance of the commandment. However, the opposite could also be argued.

Fretheim next turns to the motive clause, claiming that the term for "jealousy" is taken from the context of marriage, and is applied to God in a metaphorical way. One becomes jealous (and rightly so) when one's spouse commits adultery.²⁷² The use of the metaphor here is meant to show the severity of breaking the first commandment. The motive clause is also designed to reinforce the severity of unfaithfulness. God's love and judgment hinge on Israel's choices.²⁷³ However, the motive clause is revised after the golden calf incident.²⁷⁴ In the revised form, punishments still exist for breaking the first

²⁷² For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Gowan, 419. For Gowan God's jealousy is a mixture of love and anger, but it derives from the type of love a father has for a child (e.g., Deut 32:16).

²⁷³ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 89; Bailey, 219; Bruckner, 184; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28, n. 122; Currid, 40; Gowan, 181-182; Hamilton, 329-334; Harman, 215-216; J. Janzen, 144-146; W. Janzen, 255-257; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28-30; Mackay, 345-346; Pokrifka, 219; Roper, 325; Ryken, 529-530; Scarlata, 161; Wiersbe, 110.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Pokrifka states that God's jealousy is different from human jealousy. The latter "is often subjected to insecurity, suspicion, false judgment, and other vices" (219). Carpenter points out that *zn* is only used in reference to God, not humans, in the OT. Mackay writes that jealousy, at its base, is actually good. Envy is about desiring something one does not possess, while jealousy keeps at its center what legitimately belongs to it, and goes at the greatest lengths to protect its claim. See also Bruckner, 184; Gowan, 181-182. Bruckner believes *zn* connotes the sense of "possession." This is fitting, because the people are God's possession. God has "bought" them for God's self. When they abandon God, then God is rightly jealous. Bruckner adds that because God is creator and redeemer, God has the ability and right to be jealous. In this way, God's jealousy is not negative, but positive: it drives God to ensure that God's relationship with Israel is maintained. Gowan makes a similar point: jealousy is about possession. Humans are prohibited from jealousy because they have no right to claim anything as their own. However, since God is creator of everything, God has every right to be jealous.

²⁷⁴ Exod 34:6-7.

commandment, but now God is ready to forgive and will always love and remain faithful. This shows, according to Fretheim, that God is “an experimental theologian.” As circumstances change, “tablets can always be broken and new ones carved out.”²⁷⁵ Thus, the motive clause cannot be interpreted on its own; it must be understood in the broader context of Exodus.²⁷⁶

Similar to Stuart, Fretheim also uses a canonical approach to address possible issues with the motive clause, but instead of going Stuart’s route of turning to Deut 24:16 and emphasizing the positive aspect of the motive clause in v. 6, Fretheim draws on the Golden Calf narrative to expand on his theory about an ever-developing Law, arguing this time that God himself is an ever-developing theologian.

2.3.6 Second Commandment: Exod 20:7

The point of the second commandment, according to Fretheim, is to protect God’s reputation, which is deeply interconnected with God’s name.²⁷⁷ Misuse of one’s name or damage to one’s reputation have severe consequences for how one is perceived by others. It is the same with God. God stated earlier that God’s name should be “declared throughout all the earth.”²⁷⁸ What God wants associated with God’s name is encapsulated in Exod 34:6-7:

The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,

“The Lord, the Lord,
a God merciful and gracious,

²⁷⁵ Fretheim, 227.

²⁷⁶ Fretheim, 227.

²⁷⁷ See Ps 30:4; 97:12; 135:13. For similar interpretations, see Harman, 216; Johnstone, *Exodus* 20-40, 32-33.

²⁷⁸ Exod 19:6. For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 41.

slow to anger,
and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,
keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation,
forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,
yet by no means clearing the guilty,
but visiting the iniquity of the parents
upon the children
and the children's children,
to the third and the fourth generation.”

If the association between God's name and Exod 34:6-7 is not compromised, God's name will bring others to God. However, if God's name is tarnished or used in false ways,²⁷⁹ then God's ability to draw others in will be hindered.²⁸⁰ Thus, it makes sense that breaking this commandment leads to harsh consequences.²⁸¹

Scholars have tended to limit this commandment's scope to divination, magic,²⁸² or swearing falsely.²⁸³ But the commandment exceeds these narrow understandings. According to Fretheim, it also has in view “empty phrases or easy religion or the latest ideology of a social or political sort.”²⁸⁴ Any association between God's name and these things is destructive. The problem, for example, is that if God's name is associated with a particular ideology, those who oppose the latter could quite easily oppose the former. Proper use of God's name involves prayer and praise, including witness of God's goodness and righteousness.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁹ E.g., false prophecy; see Deut 18:20. For similar interpretations, see Gilbert and Stallman, 46-47; Harman, 216; Ryken, 540-541. Concerning the motive clause, Ryken writes that when one breaks the commandment, one attempts to do harm to God's honor. Thus, God has the right to condemn this person. Ryken states that a modern form of false prophecy occurs when we use God's name to promote ourselves. For example, when one uses the phrase “God directed me to do this.” See Ryken, 545.

²⁸⁰ For a similar interpretation, see Hamilton, 335-336.

²⁸¹ Fretheim, 227-228.

²⁸² See Lev 19:12; Ps 24:4; Matt 5:34-37.

²⁸³ Lev 24:16.

²⁸⁴ Fretheim, 228.

²⁸⁵ Fretheim, 228-229. E.g., Ps 59:30; 34:3; 22:22; 45:17; 18:49; 96:2-3; 20:7; 48:10; 86:9.

For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 102; Bailey, 221; Bruckner, 184; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 43; Hamilton, 335-336; Harman, 216; J. Janzen, 148; W. Janzen, 258; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Larsson, 145-146; Page, 85; Ryken, 539, 541-542, 543-544.

With this commandment, Fretheim engages exclusively in a canonical approach. While Stuart uses a historical approach to discern what the commandment originally prohibited, Fretheim seeks to understand why the commandment was given in the first place, concluding that God's name and reputation are intertwined. Similar to Stuart, though, Fretheim follows a Protestant tendency to expand the application of Exod 20:7. However, unlike Stuart who employs a grammatical approach and draws on the NT, Fretheim again uses a canonical approach, turning to Exod 19:6; 34:6-7. His conclusion that the commandment prohibits associating God's name with social and political ideologies strongly challenges the various evangelical (and broader Christian) groups that have and continue to do so.

2.3.7 Third Commandment: Exod 20:8-11

One keeps the Sabbath holy, Fretheim states, by separating it from the other six days. On this day, one's self, family, servants, and animals are to rest. The command is to "remember" the Sabbath, which includes not only recalling it in one's mind, but enacting it in one's life.²⁸⁶ Humans do not have the right to do as they wish all the time. For one day of the week, God has the right to determine what will be done. The commandment

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. J. Janzen states that the reason why God gives God's name to Israel is so that Israel can "invoke God's presence (Jer 2:6), ask or pronounce God's blessing (Num 6:22-27), and assure oneself of God's protection (Prov 18:10)" (148). In a similar vein, Bailey writes that speaking God's name "symbolized his dwelling among them [Israel]" (221). Larsson points to Matt 6:6ff and Eccl 5:2 to warn that when one does use God's name, one should be careful, even in worship and prayer, and avoid hypocrisy. Failure to do either would constitute breaking the commandment.

²⁸⁶ On the subject of remembering, see Exod 2:24. For a similar interpretation, see Ryken, 549-550.

does not actually indicate that the day is to be conducted with worship.²⁸⁷ However, the phrase “sabbath to the Lord” opens the possibility.²⁸⁸

The Sabbath may have originated outside of Israel, though it is difficult to determine. As a practice within Israel, it evolved over a long period. For example, the OT gives it different rationales on three separate occasions.²⁸⁹ Fretheim suggests that these rationales continue to change up to the present. What remains consistent, at least in the OT, is the belief that the Sabbath is not a burden, but a gift.²⁹⁰

In its rationale, Exodus links Sabbath rest to the seventh day of creation in which God rested, instead of the exodus from Egypt or the revelation of law. This divine rest was not out of physical need or ethical concerns.²⁹¹ Fretheim writes, “It is a religious act with cosmic implications.”²⁹² God’s resting on the seventh day “finished” creation. That rest was then integrated into the very rhythm of creation itself. When the created world follows the Sabbath commandment, it is thus in “tune” with the *order* of creation. This also means that if the created world does not follow the Sabbath commandment, it introduces chaos into creation. The modern world, with its frenetic behavior and refusal to rest, is proof enough that a world without Sabbath leads to chaos. It makes sense, then, that the OT prescribes the death penalty as the consequence for breaking the Sabbath

²⁸⁷ For a similar interpretation, see Dozeman, 488-492; W. Janzen, 258-261. W. Janzen sees the Sabbath as the greatest of all religious festivals: each week, Israel is directed to keep in mind that the greatest worship it can give to God is to do nothing, and to leave everything, in faith, to God.

²⁸⁸ Fretheim, 229.

²⁸⁹ Exod 20:10-11; 31:12-17; Deut 5:13-15.

²⁹⁰ Fretheim, 229. This is affirmed in the NT with Mk 2:27, which states, “The sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the sabbath.”

For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44, 46; Enns, 418-419; Larsson, 147; Ryken, 553.

²⁹¹ Gen 2:2.

²⁹² Fretheim, 230.

commandment, since creation itself is in jeopardy.²⁹³ When one rests on the Sabbath, one is able to “recognize the decisive role of God in creation.”²⁹⁴ This recognition enables one to truly rest, as one is reminded that God is in control. Though ethics is not a concern in Exod 20:8-11, it does become a major rationale in Exod 23:12, 34:21, and Deut 5:14-15. These texts show that the Sabbath is an “egalitarian institution,” meant for every person and every animal, regardless of status. Each time the Sabbath is observed, one is reminded of how one should treat others. In this way, the Sabbath brings to mind the eschaton, with its lasting peace and equality.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Exod 31:12-17; 35:2. For similar interpretations, see Bruckner, 185; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 45-46; Currid, 42; Dozeman, 488-492; Enns, 418-419; Johnstone *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35; Larsson, 146; Motyer, 218, 233; Mackay, 348-350; Pokrifka, 223-224; Ryken, 552; Scarlata, 163.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Enns states that six days of work and one day of rest is creation’s rhythm. God commissioned Israel to recreate the world, and so to follow the pattern of creation is only fitting. There is also resonance with the Garden of Eden. Canaan is like a new garden. Following the pattern of creation in Canaan is establishing order amid chaos, as God once did when the universe was created. In this way, Israel is imitating God. Currid states that observing the Sabbath means “*commemorating God’s creative work*. The Sabbath is a repetition and a remembrance of God’s past work” (42). Johnstone argues that P understands the observance of the Sabbath as maintaining the universe’s order. In Genesis, God blesses the Sabbath, declaring it “good.” The Sabbath is both a gift and commandment to Israel. Israel gets to rest as God does, and be a part of what the world was when it was first created. In addition, in this day, Israel looks forward to the future, in which the world will return to perfection. Larsson sees the imitation of God in this commandment as the forming of a “close partnership.” He adds that sanctifying the Sabbath through rest also sanctifies God’s name. This commandment and the previous one, then, are closely linked. Scarlata makes the point that lack of rest leads to strife that can lead to chaos and destruction. For Pokrifka, the Sabbath is also especially important in that breaking this commandment can lead to the breaking of every commandment before it. Lack of acknowledging God “as the Creator, the giver of the Sabbath rest, and the extravagant provider, will inevitably lead to the creation and worship of idols for productivity, prosperity, and protection” (224).

²⁹⁴ Fretheim, 230.

²⁹⁵ Fretheim, 230. For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 90-91; Bailey, 221-222; Bruckner, 185; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44-46; Coggins, 79; Gilbert and Stallman, 50; Hamilton, 337-340; Harman, 216; J. Janzen, 148-149; W. Janzen, 258-261; Larsson, 148; Mackay, 349; Motyer, 233; Page, 87; Pokrifka, 224-225; Roper, 328, 342; Ryken, 550-554, 556; Scarlata, 163; Wiersbe, 111.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Pokrifka writes, “the Sabbath rest is a foretaste of the eschatological justice that God will one day accomplish for all God’s people and all creation to enjoy” (225). See Hebrews 4. Pokrifka adds that the commandment is designed to address a problem in the postlapsarian world of work, in which humans find themselves incapable of resting. The fear of not having enough drives people to work too hard and work others to death. In light of this predicament, the Sabbath is designed to help people trust in God, and rest and worship God. Doing this makes the day holy. But Israel must work the other six days. God blesses those who work diligently (see Prov 6:6-11; 10:4; 14:23; 24:33-34; 28:19; Eccl 11:6). J. Janzen adds that working more than six days creates an idol out of work. It is to do what pharaoh did. Resting on the seventh day prevents this. Ryken notes that some scholars see in this commandment the first time in the history of the world that people in

Once again, typical of Fretheim's approach throughout his commentary on the Decalogue, he focuses on historical issues only to the extent they provide useful information for contemporary application. Fretheim begins his comment on the Sabbath commandment by noting that the Sabbath may have originated outside Israel. He then switches quickly to the development of the commandment in Israel. Applying his thesis of the evolution of Law in the Bible, he discusses the development of the rationale clause from Exodus to Deuteronomy. Fretheim focuses on this historical issue for several reasons. First, it reinforces his thesis about the evolution of Law; second, it resolves the tension between Exodus and Deuteronomy's rationale clauses; third, it allows him to underscore the concept of Sabbath as gift; and fourth, it sets him up to discuss contemporary applications of the commandment. Fretheim brings Exodus and Deuteronomy's rationale clauses together in a canonical approach, creating two reasons to follow the commandment today: the rhythm of creation and the egalitarian nature of the commandment. The three-stage process is present, but is referenced explicitly only once with Fretheim's comment about the eschaton and lasting peace and equality. This comment, however, reveals that Fretheim believes the commandment is still relevant today, because it is supported in the NT.

the lower social order were given the same right to rest as people higher in the higher social order. Carpenter argues that observing the Sabbath was a way of affirming Yahweh as God, redeemer, and creator. In a similar vein, Larsson argues that since the Sabbath does not follow any discernable rhythm in nature (e.g., moon cycles), "it is a confession of the Creator as the one above and beyond creation" (148). Larsson emphasizes the similarity in Jewish and Christian beliefs that the Sabbath is a "foretaste of the ideal world at the end of days," which includes "a new heaven and a new earth," filled with peace. He then points to a midrash of Zech 14:7 from *Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer* 18, which interprets "continuous day" in Zech 14:7 to be referring to the Sabbath. The Sabbath in Genesis 1 is not said to have an "evening and morning," as the other days do, which means that this day is a "continuous day," in that it gives a "taste of eternity" (148).

2.4 PETER ENNS

Peter Enns is professor of Old Testament at Eastern University. Enns' *Exodus* commentary is part of the *NIV Application Commentary Series*. The goal of the series is to facilitate application of the biblical message to the contemporary world, in order to discern how the Bible guides a Christian's life in the present. To do this, the commentaries are broken up into three sections. The first, called "original meaning," seeks to help the reader understand the text in its original context, examining "the historical, literary, and cultural context of the passage"²⁹⁶ in addition to the grammar and meaning of Hebrew terms. The second section, called "bridging contexts," underscores the "timely and timeless aspects of the text."²⁹⁷ God spoke to specific people in specific times and circumstances. Understanding these is essential to understanding God's message. These messages may seem unrelated to one's life today; however, because we are all human, the messages of the past can speak to situations today. Indeed, there is a "universal dimension" to the Bible: "the timeless nature of Scripture enables it to speak with power in every time and in every culture."²⁹⁸ For Enns, this section involves tracing the development of concepts in the text from the Exodus context through the rest of the OT to the end of the NT. The third section, called "contemporary significance," assumes that the Bible can "speak with as much power today as it did when it was first written."²⁹⁹ It shows this by identifying contemporary issues that are similar to those in the biblical text and offering ways in which the biblical text might help one understand and address

²⁹⁶ Enns, 9.

²⁹⁷ Enns, 10.

²⁹⁸ Enns, 10.

²⁹⁹ Enns, 11.

those contemporary issues.³⁰⁰ As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the commentary series' approach explicitly utilizes a three-stage approach.

2.4.1 The Purpose of the Law

2.4.1.1 Original Meaning

God did not simply rescue Israel from slavery. God expected something in return. The point of Exod 19:5 is to remind Israel that her rescue from slavery is so that she might obey God. Enns is clear, however, that this does not mean Israel must earn salvation through obedience to the law. God has already saved Israel. Rather, obedience to the law is “what is expected of a people *already* redeemed.”³⁰¹

2.4.1.2 Bridging Contexts

Exod 19:5-6 establishes and makes known God's full plan for Israel: she is to aid God in redeeming the world. However, Israel's ability to do so is marked by repeated failure. Even at Mount Sinai, Israel plunges into disobedience with the golden calf. Israel's accumulated failures over the centuries do the exact opposite of what was intended: it pushes the nations away from God, giving them little reason to establish their own relationships with God.³⁰² Only in the NT does the “ideal of Exodus 19:5-6 come to fruition,”³⁰³ both with Christ and the church. Where Israel failed, Christ is fully God's

³⁰⁰ Enns, 9-12.

³⁰¹ Enns, 387-389. Quotation from Enns, 387.

³⁰² Enns points to other texts that exemplify this point: 1 Kgs 9:6-9; Ps 44:13-14; Jer 24:9; Ezek 5:14-15; 14:8; 22:4; 23:10.

³⁰³ Enns, 397.

treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation.³⁰⁴ Through Christ's work and perfect obedience, the "universal call to the nations is finally and fully put into effect."³⁰⁵ Through its union with Christ, the church, as the new Israel, joins in Christ's role, sent to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. By living a life distinct from the rest of the world, the church becomes a "light to the Gentiles," guiding them to God.³⁰⁶

2.4.1.3 Contemporary Significance

What this means for the church today is that Christians are called to be distinct. The way in which Israel was distinct was made clear through the law. The law does not apply to Christians today, because Christ fulfilled the law.³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, Christians are subject to "moral obligations," which are outlined in various places of the New Testament, "particularly the letters."³⁰⁸ A Christian should strive to maintain the NT's moral obligations and no longer sin. On the one hand, being saved by God's grace means that one has "died to sin and entered a new life where sinning should be repulsive."³⁰⁹ On the other hand, upholding the NT's moral obligations ensures that a Christian remains distinct from others. The purpose of the distinction, as Exodus 19 and 1 Peter 2 state, is to lead others to Christ.³¹⁰ To be sure, one is not saved in any way through moral action. Living by God's moral obligations is nothing other than a "reflection" of the reality that

³⁰⁴ For a similar interpretation, see Wiersbe, 100-107. For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Scarlata, 148. Scarlata argues that the law "was not unattainable or burdensome, which is why Moses later says to the people, 'the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it' (Deut 30:14)" (148). The covenant formed between God and Israel at Sinai would remain forever, as Israel continued to seek out how to be holy in each new generation to the present.

³⁰⁵ Enns, 397.

³⁰⁶ Enns, 396-399. For a similar translation, see Pokrifka, 218.

³⁰⁷ See Matt 5:17.

³⁰⁸ Enns, 404. See 1 Pet 2:4-12; Matthew 5-7; Romans 12-15; and Ephesians 4-6.

³⁰⁹ Enns, 404. See Rom 6:1-4.

³¹⁰ See Matt 5:13-16.

“our citizenship is in heaven.”³¹¹ It is important to keep the purpose of one’s moral actions in mind, lest one succumb to legalism. The one who lives a moral life, and does so with humility, is offering the best argument for God’s existence and the logic of the gospel.³¹²

2.4.1.4 Analysis

Enns, as noted in the introduction, explicitly moves through the three-stage process. One can detect a strong similarity between Enns, Stuart and Fretheim in their positive evaluation of the Law, and their insistence that nevertheless the Law does not save. Enns, though, diverges from Stuart and Fretheim in two significant ways. The first is his argument that Israel failed in being God’s treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation. According to Enns, only Christ and the church are able to fully realize this vision. Fretheim does argue the church is in continuity with Israel, but stops short of saying the church replaces Israel. Stuart never addresses the issue. The second is Enns’ emphasis on the purpose of the Law as a means of distinction between Israel/church and the rest of the world. Enns’ interpretation could be seen as a type of covenantal nomism, and it shares Fretheim’s concern about possible legalism. But while Fretheim emphasizes the ability of the Law to help Israel/church maintain a relationship with God and make Israel/church priests, Enns concentrates far more on the ability of the Law to make Israel/church distinct from the other nations, which will in turn make Israel/church a compelling witness.

³¹¹ Enns, 405.

³¹² Enns, 403-407.

The desire for distinction, or to make oneself different from “the world” (a classic mantra being “in the world but not of it”), is a key concern among evangelicals. Enns certainly invigorates the drive here. What might be surprising but encouraging for some evangelicals is that he roots the goal of being distinct in God’s command to Israel at Sinai. Such a surprise satisfies a desire to find continuity between Christianity and Israel.

2.4.2 Original Context

2.4.2.1 Introduction and Exod 20:2

Enns identifies Exod 20:2 as the Decalogue’s prologue. Its purpose is to remind Israel of who God is, what God has done for it, and how law is connected to grace. Through a gracious act, God has rescued Israel from Egypt. In light of this salvation, Israel is called to be a holy people. Redemption means a new way of living; the purpose of the law is to indicate that way. In other words, out of grace comes the law, which shows Israel how to be a holy people.³¹³

In addition, the prologue provides the context for the Decalogue, which is crucial. The context indicates the Decalogue “was given by God to a people he has just

³¹³ Enns, 411-412. For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 96-100, 104-105; Ashby, 88; Bailey, 209; Bruckner, 170-173, 180-181; Carpenter, *Exodus 1-18*, 27; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 12-13, 38; Dozeman, 415-416, 424-426, 438-447, 474; Garrett, 139-141, 459-460, 469, 473; Gilbert and Stallman, 40; Gowan, 175-177, 182, 187; Harman, 205, 212; J. Janzen, 132-136 142-143; W. Janzen, 26, 237-239, 250; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 195-201, 397-410; Larsson, 128-129, 138-140, 142; Mackay, 322, 338-339; Motyer, 195-201, 213, n. 2, 214-215, 220-221, n. 17; Roper, 315-316; Ryken, 457, 495-498; Scarlata, 148; Wendland, 120-121; Wiersbe, 102-103, 107-108.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Johnstone states that God’s choice of Israel was out of God’s freedom. All the earth is God’s, and for some reason, God chooses Israel. In W. Janzen’s view, the law is a form of grace: it is a gift, which is meant to lead Israel to God, who will be an infinitely greater master to Israel. Thus, the law provides the way Israel can respond to the redemption it has just received. Grace brings the law, but grace is also present when the law is broken, as seen in the golden calf story.

redeemed.”³¹⁴ The Decalogue shows this people how to be “holy.” Thus, the Decalogue is not given to anyone as a guide to moral living, but to a specific group of people, so that they might know and become more like God. Those who take up the Decalogue assist God in “re-creating” the world.³¹⁵

Similar to Stuart and Fretheim, Enns uses the majority of his interpretation of Exod 20:2 to ground his introductory comments about the Law in this verse. Enns, however, also underscores the role of grace. Consequently, Enns employs a key concept and concern among evangelicals and intertwines it with Israel and the Law, a connection many evangelicals might not think to make. Such a connection disturbs any notion that grace only appears in the NT.

2.4.2.2 First commandment (Exod 20:3)

What God has done for Israel, Enns argues, has made God “worthy” of Israel’s singular devotion to God. It is logical, then, that the first commandment should come after v. 2, stating unambiguously that Israel’s devotion to God is not a repayment for what God has done; rather, it is the only proper response to the love and devotion God has shown. One can observe a development running from the prologue, through the first commandment, to the other nine. The prologue gives the motivation to follow the commandments, while the first commandment gives the “conceptual framework” in which the other nine are to be interpreted. The first commandment makes clear that God is addressing Israel alone, and that God alone is Israel’s God.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Enns, 411.

³¹⁵ Enns, 410-413. For similar interpretations, see Coggins, 78; W. Janzen, 279-280; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 41-45. Janzen argues that a Christian can use the Decalogue as a resource when joining in an ethical discourse with broader society.

³¹⁶ Enns, 413.

The phrase *לֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עִלְפָּנִי* (“you shall *have* no other gods before me”) makes the most sense, Enns states, as expressing a monolatrous theology.³¹⁷ The Israelites were living in a world of polytheism and were undoubtedly influenced by it.³¹⁸ This does not imply that Israel’s monolatrous view is correct; rather, it reveals a God who is able to connect with Israel at its current state of development. As Israel matures, God will teach Israel that there really is only one God.³¹⁹ Israel’s devotion to God also sets it apart from the other polytheistic nations.³²⁰ One day, the other nations of the world will be called to be monotheistic, but the first step in that direction is Israel’s sole devotion to God.³²¹

Enns’ exposition of the first commandment employs two methods. First, similar to Fretheim, Enns takes a literary approach and identifies a logical progression between the prologue, first commandment, and the other nine. Second, Enns engages the henotheism versus monotheism debate. Rather than taking a grammatical approach like Stuart, Enns employs historical criticism and concludes that, in its historical context, Israel would likely have been monolatrous.³²² Enns quickly follows this, however, with a qualifying statement. Similar to Fretheim, he argues that there is a development, but

³¹⁷ That is, a theology which promotes devotion to one God, while acknowledging the existence of other gods.

³¹⁸ As further evidence of this position, Enns reminds the reader of the conflict between God and the pharaoh. In this event, God did not exclaim that the Egyptian gods did not exist. Rather, God showed that God was more powerful. This will serve as a useful reminder to the Israelites as they enter Canaan, another land of polytheism.

³¹⁹ Enns points to Isa 40:18-20; 44:9-22 as instances of the development of Israel’s theology.

³²⁰ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 102; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 36; Mackay, 342; Page, 81; Roper, 308; Scarlata, 152. Alexander adds that v. 3 is a radical commandment in the ANE, where polytheism is the norm. “Before me” does not mean “order of priority,” but that “images of other gods” should never be placed “in the Lord’s presence,” which other people groups did in the ANE (c.f. 1 Sam 5:2-7 [102]).

³²¹ Enns, 413-414.

³²² Monolatry is similar to henotheism, in that both acknowledge the existence of many gods. However, while a henotheist makes an individual choice to devote him/herself to one god, a monolatrists insists that all people devote themselves to the same god.

instead of revelation itself evolving over time, Enns argues that God eventually corrected Israel's own faulty theology, leading Israel from a monolatrous to monotheistic theology.

2.4.2.3 Second commandment (Exod 20:4-6)

Enns argues that the second commandment naturally follows the first, and provides more detail. It bars the creation of any idol, but it is not totally evident whether v. 3 extends this to images of God also. At the very least, the commandment targets idols of other gods. In doing this, the commandment separates Israel from other nations by prohibiting a practice that other nations continually engaged in. This fact could be taken as a contextual clue, meaning, Israel is not to make an image of God as well, because if Israel did, it would be imitating the other nations, and would not be fully separate from them.³²³

The rest of the commandment speaks of punishments for those who disobey, and blessings for those who obey. God's desire for Israel to remain steadfast is expressed as jealousy.³²⁴ Interestingly, Enns indicates, the word for "visit" (פָּקַד) was used in the context of God's punishing Egypt in previous chapters,³²⁵ but is now used in the context of God's punishing Israel. The "generations" referenced in the motive clause, he says, should probably not be taken entirely literally. When Amos 1-2 repeats multiple times the formula "for *three* sins... even for *four*," it is not speaking of three or four sins, but many. Something similar is going on in Exod 20:5-6. The meaning of "third and fourth generation" is that sin will affect Israel in long-lasting ways. The same is true of

³²³ Enns, 414-415.

³²⁴ For a similar interpretation, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 30-32.

³²⁵ See Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19.

obedience. The phrase “thousands of generations” is not meant literally, but indicates that obedience will affect Israel for a very long time, perhaps indefinitely.³²⁶

There is also a clear discrepancy between the cross-generational punishment (visiting the sins of the fathers on the children for multiple generations) in the second commandment and Deut 24:16 and Ezek 18:4, which explicitly speak against cross-generational punishment. What prevents Exod 20:5-6 from being in contradiction with Deut 24:16 and Ezek 18:4 is that Deuteronomy and Ezekiel speak specifically of individual crimes that require the death penalty. Exodus speaks in more general terms—of how people’s actions will affect the entire community, not just a father and his descendants.³²⁷

³²⁶ Enns, 415-416. For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 89-90; Bruckner, 183; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28, n. 28, 42-43; Gowan, 177; Hamilton, 324-325; Harman, 216; Mackay, 347-348; Pokrifka, 220; Scarlata, 162; Wiersbe, 110.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. Bruckner believes the motivation clause should be seen as an argument for choosing *hesed* (lovingkindness), and an encouragement for those who fail to do so. Those who love God will experience exponential success. Those who do not, punishments may last for a time, but God’s *hesed* lasts far longer. The meaning being conveyed here is that “God would never abandon creation or those who would remember their redemption” (183). Carpenter states that the *hesed* that God shows Israel is specific actions, as outlined in the Torah. God must enact punishment, but v. 6 shows that God’s love is greater than God’s judgments, and that the latter is rooted in the former.

³²⁷ Enns, 416-417. Enns points to Joshua 7 as evidence. For similar interpretations, see Scarlata, 161-162. See also Bailey, 220; Bruckner, 183; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28, n. 123; Currid, 40; Hamilton, 329-334; J. Janzen 146-147; W. Janzen, 255-257; Motyer, 217; Pokrifka, 220; Roper, 326; Ryken, 531.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. While some see a contradiction between Deut 24:16 and Exod 20:5-6, Motyer argues that each of them conveys a complementary point: Deuteronomy prohibits humans from administering cross-generational punishment, while Exodus states that only God can. However, though God has a right to do this, this does not mean that God has to (Motyer points to Ezek 18:4, 14-17 as evidence of God’s discretion). Motyer also argues that the vv. 5-6 is a description of “genetic inheritance”: that which is passed down from father to son.

J. Janzen argues that Deut 7:7-11; 24:16; Ezek 18:2-4; Jer 31:29-30 limit punishment to the offender. If one reads the motivation clause of Exod 20:5-6 in light of them, one could argue that its intent is not to warn the reader that his/her descendants will be punished for his/her sin; rather, its intent is to indicate that everyone’s life is bound together; we influence and are influenced by each other in both positive and negative ways. How one worships God will “impact” those around one, especially the people closest to one, one’s family. This could be negative, but as the motivation clause states, it can also be positive, extending to a thousand generations. The positive side is also a result of God’s love. As a result, the good that exists in the world can at least be attributed to the good acts people made long ago.

Roper emphasizes that children receive the “consequences of sin rather than the guilt of sin” (326). No one is punished for a parent’s sins. This is made clear by Deut 24:16 and Ezek 18:20. The consequences of sin can include learning the parent’s “bad habits,” or being scarred, perhaps for generations, by the

Enns resolves the ambiguous relationship between v. 3 and vv. 4-6 using a historical approach. Fretheim, we might recall, engaged in grammatical and canonical exegesis. Through Enns' historical approach, he again returns to the theme of distinction that he discussed in his introductory comments about the Law. Enns states that the point of vv. 3-6 is to be different than the other nations; thus, idols of any god are banned. Similar to Fretheim and Stuart, Enns takes on the potentially problematic motive clause through canonical exegesis. But while Stuart and Fretheim attempt to lessen the severity of the motive clause, Enns downplays the severity by explaining it as a description of the natural consequences of sin and faithfulness. As a note of encouragement, Enns states that the latter always outlasts the former.

2.4.2.4 Third Commandment (Exod 20:7).

God's name (Yahweh), Enns states, is of the highest significance, to the point that two chapters of Exodus are spent explaining it (chapters 3-4). God's name binds the entire people of Israel together, past and present and is a mark of intimacy between Israel and God. Only Israel is to refer to God as Yahweh. The meaning of the third commandment, however, is not entirely clear. To break the third commandment could mean to misuse God's name,³²⁸ or to say "something false about God, something untrue

"sorrow, sickness, humiliation, incarceration, and early death" that a parent will receive for his/her own sin (326). A major example of this is the innocent children who had to suffer the exile, because of their parents' sins.

See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 42; W. Janzen, 255-257; Mackay, 346; Pokrifka, 220; Scarlata, 161; Wiersbe, 110. According to W. Janzen, an analysis of family life in the OT will help explain the concept: an extended family of multiple generations lived in close proximity to each other during this time. Typically, a parent's child, after marriage, would live near the parent. Since people married earlier, there would often be four generations living near each other. The commandment is addressed to the head of the household: if this person sins, it will affect multiple generations, because multiple generations live *nearby*. In this way, the motivation clause is communicating that one's actions have an effect on one's family.

³²⁸ This is the direction the NIV takes, which translates אִשָּׁן to mean "misuse."

that compromises his honor,”³²⁹ to employ God’s name in a curse against others, or to treat God’s name disrespectfully in any way. Enns himself refrains from giving a definitive interpretation, but finds all of these probable.³³⁰

Similar to Stuart and Fretheim, Enns explores the possibility of a wide applicability for Exod 20:7, employing a canonical approach. However, without further information offered in Exod 20:7, Enns stops short of affirming a broad range.

2.4.2.5 Fourth Commandment (Exod 20:8-11)

According to Enns, the commandment is broken up into three parts: the commandment (v. 8), details about the commandment (v. 9-10), and the rationale clause (v. 11). The length of the commandment, its appearance in Exod 16:26, and its reappearance in Exod 31:12-17 and 35:1-3 indicates that this commandment is of supreme importance.³³¹ The command to “remember” does not simply mean to recall the Sabbath, but to enact it.³³² The phrase זָכוֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ can be translated as “remember the Sabbath day in order to keep it holy.”³³³ In other words, to remember the Sabbath day means to keep it holy.³³⁴ This is done by everyone, including servants, animals, and aliens.³³⁵

³²⁹ Enns, 417. Such an interpretation follows Exod 23:1, which uses שווא to mean “false.”

³³⁰ Enns, 417.

³³¹ For a similar interpretation, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35. Johnstone adds that the specialness of the Sabbath can be seen in the fact that only this day has a name, and all other days lead up to it.

³³² Enns points to Exod 2:24 and 6:5, in which God remembering Israel did not simply mean recalling that Israel exists or is God’s people, but also meant action, in which God rescued Israel. Thus, remembrance in a biblical sense requires action.

³³³ Enns, 418. Enns reads the ל in לְקַדְּשׁוֹ as giving a sense of purpose.

³³⁴ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 91; Ryken, 549-550, 560. Ashby argues that the command to “remember” is paralleled by the Greek concept of *anamnesis*. In 1 Cor 11:24, Christians are called to remember the Lord’s Supper, which means they are called to reenact it, to experience the rest God did at the end of creation during the first Sabbath.

³³⁵ Enns, 418. For a similar interpretation, see Ryken, 553.

Enns suggests that neither “work” nor “servants” are defined clearly in the text.³³⁶ It may seem odd, but not impossible, that Israel had servants, even after having been released from slavery.³³⁷ There is some sense of a “humanitarian motive” in Exod 20:10—the desire to give servants a rest. This idea, however, is made far more explicit in Deut 5:14-15. The primary rationale for the Sabbath commandment in Exodus is given in v. 11, with God’s creation of the world and rest on the seventh day.³³⁸

Enns uses a canonical approach to analyze the Sabbath commandment, turning to other verses throughout the Bible to discern its significance and meaning. His primary interest is figuring out what the commandment actually says, even the shocking elements (e.g., possible slavery in Israel). This is perhaps partly because numerous traditions surround the commandment that can encourage one to misunderstand it. Enns’ analysis leads him to stress the importance of the Sabbath and its integration in the rhythm of creation (see footnote 293). To observe the Sabbath, he believes, is to imitate God, creating order from chaos.

2.4.3 The Decalogue: Bridging Contexts

Much of the focus of the Decalogue, according to Enns, is on the community; its design is to build the community, so that it might be a “light to the nations.” The Decalogue is recapitulated in Deut 5:6-21, and is done so with a specific purpose. The audience is composed of those about to enter the Land, a new generation of Israelites.

³³⁶ Enns notes that other texts discuss what constitutes work (e.g., Jer 17:22, 24 prohibits loads being brought through the city gates).

³³⁷ See Enns, 418, n. 19.

³³⁸ Enns, 418-419. For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 46; Coggins, 79.

Moses repeats the Decalogue to impress upon these people that the law is theirs, as is the covenant, even though they are not the ones who originally stood at Sinai. In effect, what Moses is doing is treating this new generation “as if they were the original community.”³³⁹ The original community that stood at Sinai in a very real way is being “re-created.” To assist this process, the Decalogue is “recontextualized” with a new story in Deuteronomy, which is not a replacement of the Exodus story, but a continuation of it. This recontextualizing of the Decalogue makes clear that the Decalogue is “an integral element of God’s redemptive plan.”³⁴⁰

2.4.4 The Decalogue: Contemporary Significance

The church today, Enns argues, should approach the Decalogue in the same way Israel once did. The Decalogue is given to a people already redeemed, and maps out a life of holiness. The Decalogue is not simply an outline of proper conduct; it helps Christians know God. Moreover, the Decalogue spells out the ways in which Christ lived a perfect life. Thus, to imitate Christ means to follow the Decalogue. However, the Decalogue should not be a means by which one gains pride or recognition for one’s righteousness or by which one can judge the morality of others, especially non-Christians.³⁴¹ Indeed, the Decalogue is observed by individual people, but it is for the purpose of a community, that it might imitate God, and thus inspire others to be redeemed.³⁴²

³³⁹ Enns, 428.

³⁴⁰ Enns, 426-429. Quotation from Enns, 429. Enns makes clear that though his focus is the Decalogue only, what he says here also applies to the other legal material in the Pentateuch.

³⁴¹ In view here, for Enns, is especially Christians who use the Decalogue to judge (non-Christian) politicians, and Christians who insist on putting the Decalogue in public schools. See also, Ryken, 498-500.

³⁴² Enns, 431-433.

Enns uses the “bridging contexts” and “contemporary significance” sections of the Decalogue to rule out the possibility of any contradiction between Exodus and Deuteronomy’s Decalogues (employing a canonical approach), and to discuss the importance of the Decalogue for Christians. Interestingly, he does not provide a “contemporary significance” in his exegesis for each *individual* commandment. Instead, after discerning the “original meaning” of each commandment, it appears he leaves it to the reader to extrapolate on his/her own how the original meaning of the Decalogue applies to contemporary situations. Enns’ interpretive move could be seen as consistent with a Protestant inclination to peel back interpretive layers that have obscured the original meaning of a text, so that an individual can more accurately discern on his/her own how a text should apply to his/her own life.

2.5 VICTOR HAMILTON

Victor Hamilton is professor emeritus of Old Testament at Asbury University. Unlike the other commentaries among the five representatives, Hamilton’s is not part of a series. It was published by Baker Academic and seeks to provide a fresh exegetical commentary on the book of Exodus. Hamilton focuses especially on grammar, translation, and the themes expressed in Exodus. His commentary divides Exodus into sections. For each section, he provides a translation, followed by grammatical notes, and a verse-by-verse commentary. In what follows, I will use the same outline as I have used for the other commentators thus far, but will add a “Grammatical Notes for the

Decalogue” section between the “Introductory Remarks on the Decalogue” and the verse-by-verse commentary sections.

2.5.1 The Purpose of the Law

Hamilton argues that the primary reason God selects Israel is so that both sides might enjoy the presence of the other.³⁴³ The relationship God forms with Israel can be likened to a marriage. In Hamilton’s understanding, just as marriage and vows are inseparable, so too Law and covenant are inseparable. However, the order is paramount. For there to be the Law, a covenant must be established first. In other words, fellowship with God precedes service to God. However, marriages also require boundaries and maintenance, which are expressed through vows. Similar to vows in a marriage, the Law is designed to protect and maintain Israel’s relationship with God.³⁴⁴ Since God is holy, God’s holiness must be protected. Thus, for Israel to be in a relationship with God, enjoying God’s presence requires that Israel be holy, as well. Part of the boundaries that the Law creates, then, is to ensure Israel’s holiness.³⁴⁵

Interestingly, while Exodus and Leviticus³⁴⁶ both call on Israel to become holy, Deuteronomy³⁴⁷ states that Israel is so already. This discrepancy, Hamilton says, is reconciled in the NT, which emphasizes that God’s people are holy and should continue

³⁴³ Hamilton points to Mk 3:14 as offering a parallel idea. See also Hamilton, 319-320. For a similar interpretation, see Larsson, 141.

³⁴⁴ See Hamilton, 301. Hamilton entertains the question of why God chose Sinai as the moment to establish the covenant and give the Law. He turns to the *Mekhilta* A.1 (see p. 212), and quotes it from Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman, 1969), 14. Hamilton states that the *Mekhilta* responds excellently to this question, but does not delve into an exegesis of the *Mekhilta*.

³⁴⁵ Hamilton, xxv, 292, 301-305, 320. The suzerain is the more powerful person or entity in a covenant that exerts power over a vassal.

³⁴⁶ See Exod 19:6; 22:31; Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:6.

³⁴⁷ See Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21.

to seek after holiness.³⁴⁸ He writes, “Israel observes these laws faithfully, not to achieve holiness or to become holy, but because Israel is holy, thanks to God’s good grace.”³⁴⁹

Like Stuart, Fretheim, and Enns, Hamilton also takes a covenantal nomist position with the Law. Similar to Fretheim, he states that the Law helps Israel maintain a personal relationship with God, but Hamilton goes a step further, depicting that relationship as a marriage. To prevent legalism or the belief that salvation requires good works, Hamilton engages in the three-stage process. He begins first with a canonical approach, where he discusses the discrepancy between Exodus-Leviticus and Deuteronomy’s understanding of holiness. He then moves to the NT, where he reconciles the two views. The implication for Christians is clear: one is holy thanks to God. To follow the Law, then, is to continue in that holiness. One might detect in this interpretation Hamilton’s Wesleyan influence: a person is justified by Christ, or made holy, which leads to a life of sanctification, or the ongoing process of becoming more holy.

2.5.2 Introductory Remarks on the Decalogue

Hamilton observes that the term “Ten Commandments” is not native to the Bible itself.³⁵⁰ The term employed in the Bible (and used only three times) is עֲשֵׂת הַדְּבָרִים (“the Ten Words”).³⁵¹ Technically, דְּבַר means “word,” not commandment. The term for commandment is מִצְוָה. Despite this technicality, the implication of “Words” in the term “Ten Words” is that these are commandments.³⁵² However, it is more proper to refer to

³⁴⁸ Hamilton, 305.

³⁴⁹ Hamilton, 292.

³⁵⁰ Hamilton, 312-321, 333.

³⁵¹ See Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4.

³⁵² In a similar way, Psalm 119 uses “words” and “commandments” interchangeably.

them as commandments than commands. The former implies a rule, while the latter implies an order given.³⁵³

The Decalogue holds a uniqueness within the biblical corpus and the ANE for three primary reasons. First, the Decalogue is the only legal text that is repeated twice in the “same sequence.”³⁵⁴ Second, the first verse of Exodus 20 indicates that God speaks the Decalogue directly to Israel, which is a break from the pattern of Moses relaying God’s message to Israel before and after chapter 20.³⁵⁵ Third, eight of the ten

³⁵³ Hamilton, 312-313. A commandment, Hamilton states, would say, “You are not to drive the car while text-messaging or talking on the cell phone.” Meanwhile, a command would say, “You may not drive the car this weekend” (313).

For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 214; Dozeman, 469-474; Harman, 212-213; J. Janzen, 142; *Exodus 20-40*, 23; Larsson, 138-139; Mackay, 341; Motyer, 212; Roper, 319; Scarlata, 157; Wendland, 119.

³⁵⁴ Hamilton, 313. Granted, each version is distinct in various ways, with the Sabbath and coveting commandments being the most distinct. The biggest difference in the Sabbath commandment is that while the motive clause of Exodus is creation and imitation, the motive clause of Deuteronomy is the exodus. The differences are not drastic. In the end, each version commands rest, and roots that rest in a powerful action by God, bringing something into existence for the first time. The phrase in Deut 5:12, “as the Lord your God has commanded you,” indicates that the Deuteronomy version was written second and is aware of the Exodus version. It does not seem probable that the author of Deuteronomy would rewrite the motive clause. Rather, it seems more probable that the author was adding further reasons to observe the Sabbath, in addition to the one stated in Exodus. Hamilton notes all of the differences between the Exodus version of the Decalogue and the Deuteronomy version on pp. 314-315.

For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 101, 104-105; Coggins, 75; Dozeman, 469-474; J. Janzen, 140; W. Janzen, 254; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 1-5, 24; Roper, 321. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. For Alexander, the uniqueness of the Decalogue can also be seen in the fact that the Decalogue is the only set of commandments written by God’s own finger on stone tablets (Exod 31:18). Johnstone states that the Decalogue is the most famous part of Exodus, and possibly the entire Bible. It is the center of Exodus, with the prologue recounting what happened (Exodus 1-19), and the commandments outlining what God commands Israel to be (Exodus 25-40). It is the most crucial sentence about the terms of the covenant (cf. Deut 4:13), and was put in the ark and the inner sanctuary (40:20-21). Moreover, it is the only instance in which all of Israel receives the revelation. In W. Janzen’s view, the Decalogue stands above other laws in the OT in terms of the way it functions, not in terms of what it says. The content is no more than a sampling of what a life of love toward God and others should look like. As for the function, it is the first of the laws given at Sinai, spoken directly to Israel. The number ten conveys a sense of completeness, as in this is a comprehensive account of what God desires. In addition, it is referred to not as commandment, but as “words.” This makes the Decalogue significant in a similar way that “Word” does for Jesus in Jn 1:1.

³⁵⁵ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 101, 104-105; Bailey, 214; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32, 34; Currid, 35; Harman, 213; Motyer, 211-213; Wendland, 120. Bailey takes note of the dramatic scene at Sinai during the giving of the Decalogue: “the smoke, fire, quaking of the earth, the trumpet sound” are blatant indications that the giving of the Decalogue is a crucial moment (214).

commandments are apodictic,³⁵⁶ employing the negative imperative formula of אל plus an imperfect verb. While this formula is used throughout the OT, most ANE law codes (e.g., Code of Hammurabi) only use casuistic formulae.³⁵⁷ It should also be noted that the apodictic formula of אל plus an imperfect verb is used only for commandments, and is understood as unconditional, universal, and eternal.³⁵⁸ The apodictic nature of the Decalogue's commandments, Hamilton asserts, suggests that the Decalogue was not used as a criminal code.³⁵⁹

Yet, while the Decalogue's form and presentation is unique to Israel, its content is not. Hamilton argues that the Decalogue is embedded in creation itself. For evidence, Hamilton refers to the pharaoh in Gen 12:10-20 who seems to know adultery is prohibited; the nations that Amos judges in 1:3-2:3, which possess a strong understanding of morality; and the animals that provide examples of how to relate to God in Isa 1:3; Jer 8:7; Prov 6:6. None of these people or animals received the Decalogue directly from God. Clearly, according to Hamilton, the contents of the Decalogue have been made known to all of creation, despite the fact that only Israel received them directly from God

³⁵⁶ Often translated as "you shall not." This is in contrast to casuistic laws, which are translated with an "if... then..." formula. Casuistic laws define consequences for actions (e.g., if X does or does not happen, then Y will be the consequence), while apodictic laws generally do not.

For similar interpretations, see Coggins, 77; Harman, 211; W. Janzen, 254; Roper, 319.

³⁵⁷ For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 102; Ashby, 84. For Ashby, the imperative formula of אל plus an imperfect verb means that the Decalogue is a series of "principles, not mere prohibitions" (84).

³⁵⁸ This is in contrast to the לע plus jussive commandment formula, which is used for particular instances and occasions. The אל with imperfect verb formula is not unique to the Decalogue. In fact, it is used fifty-five times in Exod 20:1-17; 21:1-23:19; 34:17-26. What it indicates for the Decalogue is the severity of the commandments.

For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 37. See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 27, n. 116; Roper, 321.

³⁵⁹ Hamilton, 313-318.

at Sinai. It is only logical, then, that its content is universal, incumbent on all people throughout history.³⁶⁰

In the NT, Jesus collapses the first four commandments of the Decalogue (Exod 20:3-11) into the greatest commandment (Deut 6:5), and the second six (Exod 20:12-17) into the second greatest commandment in (Lev 19:18). What this means is that one cannot be devoted to God without caring for other humans, and vice versa. Furthermore, he grounds all of the commandments in the love of God, which Paul summarizes in his own way years later in Rom 13:10: “love is the fulfillment of the law.”³⁶¹

In this section, Hamilton again engages in a three-stage process. Most of the first stage is involved in grammatical analysis, which is typical of an exegetical commentary. Hamilton, however, also combines this analysis with some historical criticism. Through this combined approach, he argues that the Decalogue is unique. As noted in the introduction, emphasis on the uniqueness of the biblical witness is typical in evangelical interpretations. In his NT analysis, Hamilton is similar to Stuart when he collapses the ten commandments into the two greatest commandments; however, Hamilton goes a step further, and collapses the two greatest commandments into the commandment to love. The summation of the Law under the command to love resonates with Fretheim’s exegesis, and reflects an evangelical belief in the supremacy of love.

³⁶⁰ Hamilton, 318-321.

³⁶¹ Hamilton, 321. For a similar interpretation, see Dozeman, 469-474; Wendland, 115-116, 122.

2.5.3 Grammatical Notes for the Decalogue

Typical of an exegetical commentary, Hamilton provides extensive notes on the grammar and translation of individual words and phrases. His work draws on parallel words and phrases throughout the OT and ANE cognates, and on the work of other scholars.

Exod 20:3. The phrase עַל-פָּנַי (“in my presence”) has a strange construction and literally means “upon/on/over/against my face.”³⁶² The most literal translation that follows English grammar would be “in my presence” (a preposition with a pronominal adjective and noun).³⁶³

Exod 20:4. The word פֶּסֶל means “sculptured image.” This type of image is carved and typically represents an object, person, or deity. The term פֶּסֶל is one of several synonyms for idol in the Hebrew language. A פֶּסֶל can be יָצַר (fashioned), קוּם (set up), or עָשָׂה (made).³⁶⁴

Exod 20:5. The term תַּעֲבֹדֵם (serve them) is a Hophal, which has a passive sense. The term usually appears as a Qal. Following Moshe Weinfeld, Hamilton speculates that the Hophal is used to help convey the alluring nature of idolatry.³⁶⁵

³⁶² For a similar translation, see Dozeman, 467-468.

³⁶³ Similar meanings of the Hebrew construction appear in Isa 65:3; Jer 6:7; Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:8; 11:13; Dan 8:17.

For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 39; Garrett, 470, n. 1; W. Janzen, 254; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28; Larsson, 143; Roper, 322-323.

For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28. Johnstone believes the phrase is intentionally ambiguous, so that it can be used in a variety of situations. It is also worth noting that עַל-פָּנַי can convey “in my presence,” but is more easily conveyed with the phrase לִפְנֵי.

³⁶⁴ For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 38; Ryken, 528.

³⁶⁵ See Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 277.

See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 27, n. 121; Currid, 37; Pokrifka, 219. Pokrifka points out that תַּעֲבֹדֵם can also mean “serve” as in “serve as a slave” or “be a slave” or “perform cultic rituals for” (219). This is important, because Israel recently left Egypt, where they were forced to serve Pharaoh and Egypt’s

To help understand the term נָקַד (usually translated as “jealous”), Hamilton turns to the Arabic and Syriac cognate *qana’a*, which can be translated as “to become dark/intensely red.” From this, Hamilton concludes that נָקַד means that God may become red in the face, showing that God is angry.³⁶⁶

The phrase עָלַד פִּקֵּד is often translated as “reckoning to,” “calling to account for,” “punishing,” or “visiting.” The phrase, Hamilton states, is a strange construction and is difficult to translate. He suggests, following Baruch Levine, that the term be understood as “hand over, deliver, assign.”³⁶⁷ The meaning, then, would be that God will assign the sins of the fathers upon the third and fourth generation.³⁶⁸

The word נִשְׁלֵחַ can be translated as “those who reject me” or “those who hate me.”³⁶⁹

Exod 20:6. The term נִשְׁמַר אֱהֵב can be translated as “keeping faith,” or “showing kindness/love to,” or “extending benevolence to.”³⁷⁰

Exod 20:7. The term נִשָּׂא (“carry” or “lift”) has a wide semantic range.³⁷¹ This range, along with the frequency of this term appearing with sound or speech, leads

gods. These gods were modeled after aspects of creation. Now that Israel has been freed from Egypt, it has the privilege of being God’s “firstborn.” Thus, in light of this, to worship other gods or idols after the exodus would be “irrational” and would be “absolutely exasperating for their heavenly Father” (219).

³⁶⁶ See also Bruckner, 187.

³⁶⁷ See Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers*, Anchor Bible 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 1993.

³⁶⁸ For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 30-32. For Johnstone, עָלַד פִּקֵּד means God will not simply punish, but investigate completely and do what is necessary to compensate for any loss and ensure no breach happens again.

See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28 n. 123. Carpenter translates the phrase as “pay close attention to with a specific purpose in mind.”

³⁶⁹ Hamilton points to Mal 3:1-2b-3a where the term is used in a similar way.

See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 42. For Carpenter, this term means that if Israel commits idolatry, it “despises,” “hates,” and “rejects” God and God’s goodness.

³⁷⁰ See also Pokrifka, 220. For Pokrifka, the term נִשְׁמַר has to do with “covenantal faithfulness.” When it refers to God, it refers to God’s unfailing commitment to Israel.

³⁷¹ E.g., “spreading false reports” (Exod 23:1), or “uttering an oracle” (Num 23:7), or “swearing an oath” (1 Kgs 8:31), or “making a prophecy” (2 Kgs 9:25), or “beginning music” (Ps 81:2), or “lifting up a prayer” (2 Kgs 19:4), or “taking up a lament” (Jer 7:29).

Hamilton to the conclusion that תִּשָּׂא אֶת-שֵׁם should be taken as an “elliptical way” of conveying “take the Lord’s name upon one’s mouth/lips.”³⁷²

The word לִפְנוֹן, when it follows a verb, takes on a nominal or adjectival meaning, and can be translated as “emptiness, vanity.”³⁷³

The term יִנָּקֶה means “leave unpunished,” and in a more legal context, can mean “be acquitted.” Hence, anyone who violates this commandment will not be acquitted.³⁷⁴

Exod 20:8. The term זָכוֹר (“remember”) is in the infinitive absolute form, but carries an imperative force.³⁷⁵ The term, as it appears in Exod 20:8, should be understood to have a gerundive force: “Remembering the Sabbath to hallow it, six days you shall labor.”³⁷⁶

Brevard Childs understands לִקְדָּשׁוּ (“to keep holy”) as a factitive Piel. This would render a translation as “make holy.”³⁷⁷

Exod 20:10. The term וּבְהֶמְתָּהּ is best translated as “your draft animals,” in order to distinguish them from other animals; the former performs work by carrying or pulling.³⁷⁸

³⁷² For similar interpretations, see Gowan, 88; Garrett, 470, n. 3; Harman, 216; Motyer, 224, 233.

³⁷³ See Hamilton, 336. For similar interpretations, see W. Janzen, 257; Motyer, 224, n. 24. For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Harman, 216. Harman takes the term to mean “hypocrisy.”

³⁷⁴ For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Motyer, 224, n. 25; Pokrifka, 22.

³⁷⁵ For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 29, n. 129; Currid, 42.

³⁷⁶ See J. Walsh Watts, “Infinitive Absolute as Imperative and the Interpretation of Exodus 20,8,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1962): 141-145. Quotations from Hamilton, 325.

³⁷⁷ Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 415.

³⁷⁸ All grammatical notes are from Hamilton, 322-325.

2.5.4 The Prologue: Exod 20:2

Hamilton observes that v. 2 of the prologue uses the term הוֹצֵאתִיךָ to describe God's delivering Israel from Egypt. This verb (root: יצא, go out) is used over seventy times in the Hebrew Bible to describe God's redemption of Israel. The meaning carries with it a sense of liberation, with God always as the subject when the reference is to the exodus.³⁷⁹ The Hiphil (causative) of עלה (go up) is also used as the verb for God bringing Israel out of Egypt. However, this term is used far less frequently (thirty-seven times) in reference to the exodus, and carries with it a sense of relocation, moving from one place to another. The subject of עלה can be people, in addition to God.³⁸⁰ Reserving יצא for God in reference to the exodus gives the term and God's role a special significance.³⁸¹

The prologue functions, Hamilton states, to explain why God has the right to command Israel with the Decalogue: God has rescued Israel from Egypt.³⁸² Indeed, both Egypt and God impose boundaries on Israel. But while Egypt's boundaries enslaved and ended life, God's will enliven and direct life. A similar prologue occurs in Gen 15:7, when God states to Abraham, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it." The similarity of the prologues binds the two stories together: God delivered Abraham with the first exodus, and fulfills the promises to Abraham with the second exodus.³⁸³

³⁷⁹ The only exception is Exod 16:3, when the people tell Moses he brought them out to a desert to starve.

³⁸⁰ E.g., Moses (Exod 17:3), the gods represented by the golden calf (Exod 32:4), and the gods represented by Jeroboam's two golden calves (1 Kgs 12:28).

³⁸¹ Hamilton, 327-328.

³⁸² For similar interpretations, see Alexander, 96; Bailey, 218, 479; Garrett, 54; Harman, 214; Larsson, 140-141; Motyer, 215-216; Pokrifka, 216; Roper, 322; Ryken, 484, 518.

³⁸³ Hamilton, 328.

As with other exegetical commentaries, Hamilton continues his close grammatical analysis in his commentary of each verse. The difference in his grammatical notes is that he spends more time on the theological significance of the grammar in his verse-by-verse commentary. After discerning the theological significance of אֵל, Hamilton engages in a canonical approach to draw out the differences between God and Egypt and to relate the significance of the exodus through Abraham. One might have expected an explicit reflection on a “third exodus” with Christ, but Hamilton leaves this implicit. Little effort is required to extrapolate from his juxtaposition between Egypt and God to a contemporary significance. Egypt today is the world; God offers an alternative with Christ.

2.5.5 First Commandment: Exod 20:3

The primary reason a commandment is given, Hamilton teaches, is because people, if left to their own devices, would do the opposite. Heretofore, he asserts, Israel has remained monotheistic (in other words, Israel was not henotheistic at any point). There has been a long tradition of monotheism from Adam to Noah to Joseph.³⁸⁴ This might make the commandment seem irrelevant, but polytheism is not often a temptation in dire circumstances. It is rather something that tempts people when they experience prosperity.³⁸⁵ Neither the Israelites in Egypt, nor their ancestors, ever experienced prosperity. Thus, the commandment was not specifically for them. However, once Israel

³⁸⁴ For similar interpretations, see Baily, 219; Garrett, 470, n. 1; Mackay, 344; Ryken, 518-520. Bailey argues that v. 3 makes the Decalogue the only ANE law code that prohibits the worship of other gods.

³⁸⁵ As evidence, Hamilton points to the fact that in many cultures, the “gods of the well-to-do usually outnumber the gods of the less fortunate” (see Hamilton, 329).

establishes itself in the Land, then the temptation toward idolatry will arise. This commandment, then, is meant especially for these later people.³⁸⁶

Admittedly, Hamilton says, v. 3 does not state unequivocally, “You shall have no other gods, for no other gods exist.”³⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the rest of the biblical witness makes clear that no other god does actually exist,³⁸⁸ and it is in light of this witness that Exod 20:3 must be read. When one does this, Exod 20:3’s actual meaning will be clear: you will not have another god, and no other god exists.³⁸⁹

In contrast to Enns, Hamilton denies any possibility of henotheism or monolatry in Israel. Hamilton does not find grammatical exegesis illuminating, so he turns to a canonical approach, informed by historical investigation, arguing that Israel had remained monotheistic heretofore, but would need the commandment going forward.

2.5.6 Second Commandment: Exod 20:4-6

What distinguishes the first commandment from the second, according to Hamilton, is that the first is about possession of other gods (you shall not have other gods), and the second concerns manufacturing (you shall not make). The first commandment also applies to everyone, as anyone can be prone to idolatry. However, the

³⁸⁶ Hamilton, 328-329. For similar interpretations, see Pokrifka, 217-218; Wiersbe, 109. Pokrifka states that breach of this commandment is a form of “spiritual adultery.” For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see Ryken, 518. According to Ryken, the commandment was essential for Israel, because it had fallen prey to polytheism in Egypt, due to Egyptian influence.

³⁸⁷ Hamilton, 329.

³⁸⁸ E.g., Deut 4:35, 39; Isa 45:14, 18, 21-22; 46:9.

³⁸⁹ Hamilton, 329.

second commandment only applies to those who have the specific skill of making an idol.³⁹⁰

It is not immediately clear, though, if the second commandment prohibits images of other gods or of Yahweh. The better interpretation is to understand idolatry as included in the first commandment. Logically, a commandment prohibiting polytheism should also prohibit worship of idols of other gods. This, then, renders the second commandment as centered on images of God.³⁹¹ Admittedly, this interpretation might create an oddity in the second commandment. The term “idol” is in the singular in v. 4 (presumably referring to an idol of God), but v. 5 seems to refer to this idol with a plural “them”: “neither pay *them* homage nor serve *them*.”³⁹² There are two possible explanations for this. The idol of v. 4, despite being in the singular, is “expanded” in v. 5 to encompass anything in the heavens, earth, or water; in other words, the commandment prohibits representations of anything in creation.³⁹³ Or, the “them” of v. 5 refers to both the other gods of v. 3 and the idol of v. 4.³⁹⁴ The second explanation, which is the preferable of the two, does lend itself to the view that vv. 3-6 should be seen as one commandment.³⁹⁵

It seems curious to Hamilton that images of God are forbidden. After all, God is described in anthropomorphic terms throughout the Bible. Clearly the biblical authors did

³⁹⁰ Hamilton, 329.

³⁹¹ For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 39; Coggins, 78; Mackay, 344; Ryken, 527-528. Ryken argues that one reason why Catholics allow images of Christ is because they take vv. 3-6 as one commandment, and thus believe the prohibition on images is reserved for “other gods,” not Christ. Ryken, in his Reformed view, takes vv. 4-6 as a separate commandment. While v. 3 is about worshiping one God, vv. 4-6 are about how to worship the one God. This includes a prohibition on images of the one God.

³⁹² Hamilton, 330. For a similar interpretation, see Gowan, 180.

³⁹³ See also W. Janzen, 255-257. Janzen argues that the long description of the prohibition is in response to the extensive ways other nations would make images of their deities using aspects of nature that bore resemblances to those deities.

³⁹⁴ For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 41.

³⁹⁵ Hamilton, 329-330. For similar interpretations, see Dozeman, 482-486; W. Janzen, 255-257.

not conceive of God as pure spirit. It is the case, however, that in Deut 4:11-20 Moses describes the revelation of God at Sinai as a voice and that “no form” of God was seen. From this, it could be inferred that since no image of God was revealed, no image can be made of God.³⁹⁶ Following Abraham Joshua Heschel, Hamilton suggests that it seems that the prohibition on images of Yahweh was to prevent Israel from eventually treating such images as idols.³⁹⁷

Like Fretheim and Enns, Hamilton focuses on the ambiguous relationship between v. 3 and vv. 4-6. Enns uses a historical approach to bring vv. 3-6 into close connection, arguing that vv. 4-6 ban images of other gods *and* God. Both Fretheim and Hamilton engage in grammatical exegesis. But while Fretheim turns also to a canonical approach, bringing in Exodus 32, Hamilton (as one might expect in an exegetical commentary) engages much more deeply in the grammar of vv. 3-6. Interestingly, both of them come to a similar conclusion: that v. 3 logically belongs with vv. 4-6 as one commandment. Hamilton then asks why images of God are prohibited. He seeks an answer through a canonical approach, but ultimately finds Heschel more attractive.³⁹⁸

Turning specifically to vv. 5-6, Hamilton interprets its discussion of reward and punishment as saying that those who violate the commandment will experience cross-

³⁹⁶ For similar interpretations, see Gowan, 180; Harman, 215; W. Janzen, 256-257; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28-30; Motyer, 217-218, 223-224, and n. 22; Pokrifka, 218-219; Ryken, 534. Motyer points to Jn 4:23-24; Col 3:16, which reinforce this point.

³⁹⁷ Hamilton, 330-331. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man's Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (New York: Scribner, 1954), 118. Hamilton argues that the Israelites were not immune from treating images associated with Yahweh as idols. For example, in 1 Samuel 4, the Israelites mistakenly think God is always present with the ark, and thus the presence of the ark will always ensure victory. For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Motyer, 232-233. Motyer argues that because archaeologists have not found images of Yahweh, Israel could not be said to have struggled with upholding vv. 4-6.

³⁹⁸ This is not the first time Hamilton turns to a Jewish source (see footnote 344). His openness to Jewish sources may be due in part to his training at Brandeis University.

generational consequences to the third and fourth generation, but those who follow the commandment will receive everlasting blessings for generations to come. The sin (עון) that the text speaks of is “deliberate” and “egregious,” the type of sin that Aaron is to confess on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21).³⁹⁹ The commandment’s motive clause states that the *punishment* for the sin, and not the sin itself, will be cross-generational.⁴⁰⁰ The concept of cross generational punishment may seem odd, as one might expect only the guilty should receive punishment. The wording of Exod 20:5-6, however, is specific. While Exod 34:7b and Num 14:18b state that God punishes descendants for the sins of their ancestors, Exod 20:5-6 indicates that “those who reject me” will be punished, and “those who are loyal to me” will be blessed. What these two phrases are saying is that if a person breaks the commandment, as his/her ancestors did, then this person will receive not only his/her own punishment for the sin, but also the punishment given to his/her ancestors. The same goes for a person who keeps the commandment as his/her ancestors did. This person will receive his/her own blessing, *and* the blessing given to his/her ancestors.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ See also Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 42; Mackay, 346-347. According to Mackay, עון refers specifically to “religious and ethical deviance,” not wrong-doing in general (346). This deviance can get passed down through the generations, as parents teach their children, which is the meaning of the motive clause. Carpenter is even more specific: in Exod 20:5, עון is the sin of idolatry.

⁴⁰⁰ Hamilton identifies Cain in Gen 4:13 as an example of the cross-generational consequence of sin.

⁴⁰¹ Hamilton, 331-334. Hamilton points out that cross-generational punishment also appears in other ANE texts. E.g., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* 395. Interestingly, in the biblical texts, there are far more examples of cross-generational punishment (e.g., Gen 9:20-27; Num 14:33; Deut 1:37; Josh 7:25; 2 Sam 12:18; 2 Sam 21:8-9; 1 Kgs 14:10-18; 1 Kgs 16:1-12; 1 Kgs 17:18; Neh 9:2) over cross-generational blessing (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:6, 13).

For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 42; Coggins, 78-79; Larsson, 144-145; Ryken, 530-531. Among these, points of particular interest include the following. For Coggins, one encounters a cultural difference between our modern world and the world of the Hebrew Bible. In the latter, cross-generational punishment was seen as natural, which is predicated on a presupposition of intimate interconnectivity across generations to a degree that does not generally exist today in the modern West. Carpenter states that the children will suffer the punishment of the parents to the third and fourth generation; however, people in any one of these generations could seek forgiveness, and God’s grace would

Some point to Jer 31:29-30 and Ezekiel 18 as rejecting cross-generational punishment. If this were the case, Hamilton asks, then why does Jeremiah say in 32:18, “You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the father’s sins into the laps of the children after them”?⁴⁰² The reason the motive clause is attached to the first and second commandments⁴⁰³ is to convey the seriousness of these commandments. If one observes these, one will be on a solid foundation to observe the others. If one breaks these, one will likely break the others.⁴⁰⁴

Similar to Stuart and Fretheim, Hamilton attempts to lessen the severity of this motive clause. Hamilton’s approach is first to examine the syntax of vv. 5-6 closely, observing that only the punishment will be cross generational. He then employs a canonical approach to note the absence of Exod 20:5’s “those who hate me” in Exod 34:7b and Num 14:18b, which signals a limitation of the application of the motive clause. Finally, he uses a canonical approach again, targeting Jeremiah 31-32 and Ezekiel 18, but this time not to limit the motive clause, as Stuart and other commentators do with these verses (see footnote 192), but to prove that the motive clause is real and serious.

end the punishment (see Lev 16:21-22). Similarly, Larsson argues that the punishment can be ended by those who love God and are obedient to God.

⁴⁰² Biblical translation from Hamilton, 334.

⁴⁰³ In Hamilton’s understanding, vv. 5-6 apply to both the first and second commandments. See p. 124 above.

⁴⁰⁴ Hamilton, 334. For a similar interpretation, see Ryken, 531. See also Garrett, 475-476. Garrett takes the motivation clause at its word. He argues that because this commandment is so serious and is one of the greatest temptations of Israel, the Decalogue gives the violation of it one of the most serious consequences: cross-generational punishment.

2.5.7 Third Commandment: Exod 20:7

Hamilton points out that the third commandment can be understood as a prohibition on swearing false oaths. Lev 19:12 provides evidence when it states, “And you shall not swear falsely by my name” (NRSV). The verb for “swear” there, שבע, appears with נשא in Ps 24:4: “Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up [נשא] their souls to what is false, and do not swear [שבע] deceitfully” (NRSV). The two words in the Psalm are used in psalmic parallelism. From this, one could argue that נשא in Exod 20:7 could refer to swearing false oaths. If this is correct, then Exod 20:7 would mean, “You shall not take/lift up [נשא] the name of the Lord your God [upon your lips/mouth] falsely”⁴⁰⁵ when you swear an oath. If this interpretation is correct, though, it creates a tension between Exod 20:7 and Lev 6:1-7. The former states that breaking the commandment cannot be forgiven, while the latter states that it is possible to forgive one who “swears falsely.” Hamilton resolves this tension by arguing that the sin may not be forgiven, unless an individual confesses it on his/her own volition, and seeks restitution. In its terseness, Exod 20:7 seems to have elided this condition.⁴⁰⁶ Unlike the first and second commandments, the consequence for breaking this commandment is directed to the individual.⁴⁰⁷

Hamilton’s primary interest in the commandment revolves around the translation and meaning of נשא in Exod 20:7, and its grammatical and theological relation to שבע in

⁴⁰⁵ Hamilton, 335.

⁴⁰⁶ For similar interpretations, see Bruckner, 184; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44; Garrett, 476-477; Gowan, 88; W. Janzen, 258; Roper, 327; Ryken, 539-540, 546-547; Scarlata, 162. What makes forgiveness for breaking the third commandment possible, Ryken states, is the atonement Christ received on our behalf on the cross.

⁴⁰⁷ Hamilton, 335-336.

Lev 6:1-7; 19:12, and Ps 24:4. This, however, does not prevent Hamilton, like the commentators before him, from expanding the applicability of the commandment (see footnote 202). Hamilton writes, “In sum, the third commandment cautions against using the Lord’s name falsely to buttress a truth claim that is fabricated. By extension, it prohibits any use of the holy name that is without any real significance, any trivialization of the Tetragrammaton.”⁴⁰⁸ This includes the casual “O my God.” Hamilton, however, does not stop here. He goes on to argue that the commandment also prohibits any *action* that dishonors God’s name.⁴⁰⁹ Such extensions of the commandment are possible, Hamilton believes, because of the grammatical flexibility and semantic range of שבע and נשא.

2.5.8 Fourth Commandment: Exod 20:8-11

The Sabbath, Hamilton argues, is of utmost significance in the Old Testament. The Pentateuch, from Sinai onward mentions it eleven times,⁴¹⁰ more than any other commandment. It is the only commandment in the Decalogue that is established in Israel before Sinai.⁴¹¹ Along with the Day of Atonement and Sabbatical Year, the Sabbath is the only day designated as “Sabbath of rest.”⁴¹² The Sabbath day and the Day of Atonement are also the only days in which every kind of work is to cease. Only the Sabbath and

⁴⁰⁸ Hamilton, 336.

⁴⁰⁹ Hamilton follows Daniel Block in arguing that the use of תָּשָׂא “suggests that bearing or carrying somebody’s name is rooted in the practice of marking or branding slaves as one would do to animals to indicate ownership” (Hamilton, 336). See Daniel Block, “Bearing the Name of the Lord with Honor,” *Bibliotheca sacra* 168:669 (March 2011): 24.

⁴¹⁰ These are Exod 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:13-17; 34:21; 35:2-3; Lev 19:3, 30; 23:3; 26:2; Num 28:9-10; Deut 5:12-15).

⁴¹¹ See Exod 16:23, 27-30.

⁴¹² See Exod 31:15; 35:2; Lev 23:3 for the Sabbath day, Lev 25:4 for the Sabbatical Year; and Lev 16:31; 23:32 for the Day of Atonement.

Jubilee Year are to be “sanctified.”⁴¹³ Finally, the Sabbath is always the first holy day listed in ritual calendars.⁴¹⁴

It is not clear from the Decalogue commandment what כָּל מְלָאכָהּ (“all your work”) means. The rest of the Bible prohibits getting food,⁴¹⁵ venturing out from the home/community,⁴¹⁶ farming,⁴¹⁷ constructing the tabernacle,⁴¹⁸ making a fire,⁴¹⁹ wood gathering,⁴²⁰ selling merchandise,⁴²¹ and moving objects.⁴²² The rest of the Bible also specifically permits certain actions: healing,⁴²³ putting fresh bread in the sanctuary,⁴²⁴ visiting someone when the circumstances are grave,⁴²⁵ and rotating guards at the palace or Temple.⁴²⁶

The commandment’s motive clause makes clear that the purpose of the Sabbath is not simply rest; rather, it is to imitate God who rested after creating the universe. This is the Bible’s most blatant description of *imitatio dei*.⁴²⁷

⁴¹³ For the Jubilee Year, see Lev 25:10.

⁴¹⁴ Hamilton, 337-338. See Exod 23:12, 14-19; Lev 23:3-44; Num 28:9-29:40. The one exception is Deuteronomy 16, in which the Sabbath is not listed.

⁴¹⁵ See Exod 16:29-30; Matt 12:1-2; Mk 2:23-24.

⁴¹⁶ See Exod 16:29b.

⁴¹⁷ See Exod 34:21.

⁴¹⁸ See Exod 35:2ff.

⁴¹⁹ See Exod 35:3.

⁴²⁰ See Num 15:32-36.

⁴²¹ See Am 8:5.

⁴²² See Jer 17:19-22; Jn 5:10.

⁴²³ See Lk 13:10-14.

⁴²⁴ See Lev 24:8-9.

⁴²⁵ See 2 Kgs 4:22-23.

⁴²⁶ Hamilton, 338-339. See 2 Kgs 11:4-8; 2 Chron 23:4-7. Hamilton does not appear to include sacrifices, which were also permitted on the Sabbath.

For interpretations that address this topic, see Garrett, 470, n. 4; Motyer, 225-226. According to Garrett, the meaning of מְלָאכָהּ can range from “personal business” (cf. Ps 107:23), to “official duties” (cf. Dan 8:27), to “a craft or skill” (Exod 35:31; 1 Chron 22:15), or any “work that one needs to take care of” (Prov 24:27 [470, n. 4]). Motyer sees the lack of specificity as intentional, so that each person could decide how to enact the Sabbath.

⁴²⁷ Hamilton, 339. For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 221-222; W. Janzen, 282-283; Motyer, 225-226; Pokrifka, 224-225; Ryken, 553-554. Pokrifka states that being in God’s image means to act as Yahweh acts, and rest on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is distinct from the Lord's Day. The latter is the eighth day, on which God created light and Jesus was resurrected. The eighth day after birth is also the day on which a Jewish male is entered into the covenant with circumcision. Thus, Jews and Christians share a common belief that one enters a covenant and becomes bonded with God on the eighth day. As for the rest that should occur on the Sabbath, Christians experience rest when they make the decision to follow Christ and take on Christ's yoke.⁴²⁸ However, this is not the full and final rest Christians will experience. That will come only at the eschaton.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁸ See Matt 11:28.

⁴²⁹ Hamilton, 339-340. See Heb 4:9 and Rev 14:13b.

For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 91; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 45; Coggins, 80; Currid, 44; Garrett, 477-478; Gilbert and Stallman, 51-52; W. Janzen, 282-283; Mackay, 350; Motyer, 225-226; Page, 86-87; Pokrifka, 225; Ryken, 556-560; Wendland, 124; Wiersbe, 111.

Among these, points of particular interest include the following. The Sabbath commandment, W. Janzen notes, is a point of controversy in Christianity. While some believe it has been rendered null (e.g., Wendland) or that it was never a commandment for Gentiles, others argue that it is still incumbent on Christians. Garrett believes the NT does not indicate explicitly that the Sabbath has any particular significance for the church. However, as W. Janzen notes, the NT does seem to give special recognition to Sunday, the day on which Christ rose from the dead, known as the "Lord's Day" (Cf. Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10.). Whether it originated in the NT, the Lord's Day gained traction with Constantine, who prohibited certain kinds of work on Sunday, and also with Augustine, who spiritualized the Sabbath. On this day, the church celebrates the resurrection and new creation that Christ has initiated. Some denominations have returned to Saturday and have (re)adopted it as the Christian Sabbath (e.g., Seventh Day Adventists). Other denominations, taking after Calvin, have refrained from doing work on Sunday.

Garrett sees two possible ramifications for the motivation clause in Deuteronomy and Exodus. In Deuteronomy, Sabbath is a way to remember and celebrate freedom from slavery in Egypt. This motive renders the Sabbath a specifically Israelite celebration. In Exodus, the Sabbath is a way to remember and celebrate creation (Exodus). This motive gives the Sabbath a universal significance: it is part of the fabric of creation. In light of Exodus' version of the commandment, Garrett believes recognition of one day of the week as unique is universally significant and important. Thus, Christians would do well to accept the concept surrounding the Sabbath (i.e., a celebration of creation) and apply it to the Lord's Day, which centers around Christ's resurrection and new creation. This day is a day of worship. It is, however, distinct from the Sabbath insofar as it centers on worship, instead of rest.

For Pokrifka, Christians have the option of following the Sabbath "in the form of the Lord's Day" or not observing the Sabbath at all, which is justified by Col 2:16 (225). See also Roper, 329.

Ryken believes observing the Lord's Day is incumbent on Christians, but how a Christian chooses to celebrate the Lord's Day and the freedom Christ has gained for humanity, is each Christian's prerogative. To create a series of regulations is to succumb to legalism. The goal is to fellowship with God. Once this is the priority, one can then ask which activities or forms of rest facilitate that fellowship.

Gilbert and Stallman argue that the Lord's Day need not be taken on any particular day. Rather, what is important is to follow the pattern of six days of work and one day of rest. Neglect of one or the other would constitute breaking the commandment.

Interestingly, there are no grammatical issues in the commandment that garner Hamilton's attention (recall that Stuart paid significant attention to the meaning of the commandment's opening exhortation, *זָכוֹר אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ*). Instead, Hamilton engages in a three-stage interpretation, beginning first with a canonical approach, gathering other Hebrew Bible texts to determine the significance of the Sabbath commandment and the details of the prohibition on work. This discussion does not seem to have much bearing on the second two stages, which he spends delineating the differences between the Lord's Day and the Sabbath. One might infer that since the Lord's Day is distinct from the Sabbath, the latter has little impact on a Christian's life. However, Hamilton's exegesis may also infer that the Sabbath has some bearing on the meaning of the Lord's Day and so a proper understanding of the Sabbath is informative. His comment about the rest that occurs on the Sabbath and Lord's Day seems to move in that direction. Stuart and Fretheim also use the NT to discern the significance of the Sabbath for Christians, but neither of them introduces the concept of the Lord's Day. For them, the NT indicates that the Sabbath itself is incumbent on Christians, along with its commandment to rest one day a week.

2.6 THOMAS DOZEMAN

Thomas Dozeman is professor of Old Testament at United Theological Seminary. Dozeman writes for the *Eerdmans Critical Commentary* series. The stated goal of the

Coggins observes that the Christian invention of the Lord's Day is "a long way from the original concern of this commandment," which was centered primarily on rest. The concept of worship only came later (80).

series is to elucidate the background, interpretation, and application of the biblical texts for readers. Each author attempts to discern the original meaning of the text, while simultaneously determining the relevance of the text for modern readers. This is done through “original translation, critical notes, and commentary on literary, historical, cultural, and theological aspects of the text,”⁴³⁰ drawing on “recent textual, philological, literary, historical, and archeological inquiry, benefiting as well from newer methodological approaches.” By “critical,” the ECC series means that the commentaries offer “detailed, systematic explanation of the biblical text.”⁴³¹

2.6.1 The Purpose of the Law

For Dozeman, a covenant is a relationship between two parties that outlines the obligations that one or both sides must uphold. Both the P(riestly) material and the non-P material in Exodus have unique understandings of the role of the Decalogue in Israel’s covenant with God.⁴³² According to the P material, the Decalogue⁴³³ is presented as Israel’s guide to becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.⁴³⁴ According to the non-P material, the Decalogue⁴³⁵ will separate Israel from the nations of the world,

⁴³⁰ Dozeman, i.

⁴³¹ Dozeman, i.

⁴³² Dozeman counts himself among those who argue that only three distinct sources can be accurately identified in the Pentateuch: the D(euteronomistic) source, the non-P source, and the P(riestly) source. Dozeman believes D was finished during the exilic period, non-P during the post-exilic period, and P sometime after non-P. See Dozeman, 35-43.

⁴³³ In addition to Exod 25-31, 35-40; Leviticus; and Numbers 1-10.

⁴³⁴ Exod 19:5b-6a.

⁴³⁵ In addition to the Book of the Covenant and the legal material in Deuteronomy.

making it a treasured possession or “private possession.”⁴³⁶ Israel’s future is an exclusive relationship with God.⁴³⁷

Contrary to the theories of various other scholars, Dozeman claims that Israel’s covenant is not modeled after a suzerain-vassal treaty. Following Lothar Perlitt,⁴³⁸ Dozeman points out that unlike a suzerain treaty, Israel’s covenant includes very little historical prologue and no curses for breaking it.⁴³⁹ Exod 19:5a is framed to make clear that the law is divinely revealed and authoritative.⁴⁴⁰

The hallmarks of a historical commentary are immediately evident in Dozeman’s opening remarks. Unlike the commentators considered above, Dozeman engages deeply in source and redaction criticism. Even so, he has points of resonance with the other commentators. Similar to Hamilton, Dozeman states that the purpose of the Law is to make Israel holy. However, unlike the others, Dozeman here does not delve into a discussion of the relation between Law and grace (though, he discusses the topic of redemption and Law in his commentary on Exod 20:2). Dozeman also, like the other commentators, depicts Law in a positive light, but his approach is quite distinct.

⁴³⁶ Exod 19:3-5a, 6b.

⁴³⁷ Dozeman, 416-431, 439-447, 474.

⁴³⁸ Lothar Perlitt, *Bundestheologie im Alten Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 36 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 163-167.

⁴³⁹ For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 33; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32, 37. However, according to Ashby, the curses are found in Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26. See Ashby, 83. Carpenter argues that the way in which Yahweh forms a relationship with Israel exceeds a suzerain vassal treaty dynamic, and that there is no parallel to it in the ANE, between humans or between deities and humans. Unlike a suzerain treaty, God liberates, instead of conquers, Israel. The people respond to God, not through offering allegiance or goods of any kind (God needs nothing from Israel), but by bonding completely to God in every way, in everything they are and do. God does not coerce or intimidate Israel, but guides Israel with trust and benefits.

⁴⁴⁰ Dozeman, 339-440.

Dozeman states that the word “law” in the Hebrew Bible spans multiple terms (e.g., torah, judgment, statute, commandment, testimony, and covenant⁴⁴¹). Law derives from God’s mouth as words, and thus is “living,” able to “change through time.”⁴⁴² There are several codifications of the law in written form (e.g., Ten Words, Book of Torah, Book of the Covenant). The writing itself does not solidify the law; rather, the written codification of law creates a “roadway” upon which people are able to “walk.” This idea is captured in the Jewish term for legal interpretation, *halakhah*, a walking metaphor, which gives the sense of an “ongoing” and “dynamic” process. The law in the Hebrew Bible encompassed most, if not all, aspects of life; however, contrary to modern law, biblical law does not seek to be comprehensive in the least.⁴⁴³

Comparisons with other legal codes from the ANE⁴⁴⁴ have shed significant light on the Hebrew Bible’s laws. Like Israel’s, these codes are not comprehensive, and they cover similar situations.⁴⁴⁵ Many scholars, Dozeman points out, have argued that various cultures, like Israel’s, must have borrowed significantly from other cultures.⁴⁴⁶ However, as Meir Malul argues, many identifications of these supposed borrowings lack sufficient comparative methodologies, and thus are unable to adequately distinguish whether similarities are by mere chance or actual borrowing.⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴¹ Notably, the terms “teaching” and “instruction” are absent from Dozeman’s list of examples. See footnote 262.

⁴⁴² Dozeman, 458.

⁴⁴³ Dozeman, 458.

⁴⁴⁴ E.g., Laws of Ur-Nammu of Ur (c. 2100 CE); Laws of Lipit-Ishtar of Isin (c. 1900 BCE), Laws of Shnunna (c. 1900), Code of Hammurabi (1728-1686 BCE); Hittite Laws (14th cen. BCE), Middle-Assyrian Laws (11th cen. BCE), Neo-Babylonian Laws (6th cen. BCE).

⁴⁴⁵ E.g., the goring ox can be found in Eshnunna 53 and Exod 21:35; and slavery can be found in Eshnunna 34 and Exod 21:2-11.

⁴⁴⁶ For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 2-3, 33; Page, 81; Scarlata, 158-159.

⁴⁴⁷ Dozeman, 459-462, citing Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 227 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1990). Dozeman does not provide page numbers.

For the authors of Exodus, the heart of religion is law. It is the source of their health, which God tells them in the wilderness. Dozeman cites Ze'ev Falk who states that for Israel, law and spirituality become one.⁴⁴⁸ This view of law is completely contrary to general Christian notions of biblical law, which are influenced by selective readings of the NT.⁴⁴⁹ These selective readings characterize law as “a system of religious legalism resistant to change and antithetical to the mystical experience with God.”⁴⁵⁰ Dozeman points out, though, that the NT also has positive views of the law that are often ignored. For example, Jesus states he has not come to abolish but fulfill the law,⁴⁵¹ and Paul uses the law to teach Christians morality.⁴⁵² Dozeman also underscores the work of E. P. Sanders, who attempts to show that there were a diversity of perspectives toward the law in the NT.⁴⁵³

As noted before, similar to our other commentators, Dozeman aims to depict the Law in a positive light. His approach is characteristic of both a historical commentary and a three-stage process. Dozeman begins by comparing Israel's understanding of Law with other ANE sources. He then goes on to discuss Jewish understandings of the Law. Both of these types of investigations are common in historical commentaries, and in Dozeman's case, both are done to help promote a positive view of the Law. From here, Dozeman moves to the second-stage of the three-stage process, describing Christian

⁴⁴⁸ Ze'ev Falk, “Spirituality and Jewish Law,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin Firmage, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 130.

⁴⁴⁹ See Gal 2:16; 3:5; Rom 8:3; Jn 1:17.

⁴⁵⁰ Dozeman, 463.

⁴⁵¹ Matt 5:17.

⁴⁵² Rom 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians.

⁴⁵³ Dozeman, 462-464. Dozeman cites E. P. Sanders' *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); “When is a Law a Law? The Case of Jesus and Paul,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Edwin Firmage, et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 139-158.

misunderstandings of the Law, and the NT exegesis that undergirds those misunderstandings. His ultimate goal is to show that the NT promotes a positive view of the Law, one that is in continuity with both Jewish and OT understandings (some will find the former more compelling, and some the latter).

As one may have gathered already, confessional historical commentaries tend not to emphasize the second two stages of the three-stage process as much as other commentary modes. Connections between the NT and contemporary Christian life are often left to the reader's own extrapolations.⁴⁵⁴ However, as Dozeman's commentary has revealed in this section, confessional historical commentaries are mindful of Christian presuppositions and concerns, and often address them, explicitly or implicitly (the latter only in the rest of the material covered here). This is in comparison to a non-confessional historical commentary, such as Propp's, which is unconcerned with correcting Christian misunderstandings of the Law. In the presentation that follows, I will provide some possible extrapolations of Dozeman's comments to demonstrate this point.

2.6.2 Introductory Remarks on the Decalogue

The Decalogue, Dozeman, believes, likely had a shorter form at one time. Various parts, particularly the Sabbath commandment (Exod 20:8-11) and the prohibition on

⁴⁵⁴ Some reviewers apparently were disappointed by the lack of contemporary application in Dozeman's commentary, noting that the *Eerdmans Critical Commentary* series stated this would be a central concern among its commentators. See e.g., Charlie Trimm, review of *Commentary on Exodus*, by Thomas Dozeman, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53:1 (Mar. 2010): 163-165; and Richard Briggs, review of *Commentary on Exodus*, by Thomas Dozeman, *Southeastern Theological Review* 3:1 (Sum. 2012): 131-133.

idolatry (Exod 20:4-6), were eventually expanded with commentary.⁴⁵⁵ The vast majority of the Decalogue is of non-P origin (Exod 20:2-7, 12-17); however, it received a Priestly edit, so that the rationale clause for the Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11) follows P's account of creation in Genesis 1.⁴⁵⁶ Dozeman surveys various theories on the origin of the Decalogue. These include Sigmund Mowinckel's argument that the Decalogue originated in a New Year liturgy,⁴⁵⁷ and Albrecht Alt's theory that it originated in Israel's cult and initially contained only apodictic commands.⁴⁵⁸

Abandoning the search for origins, other scholars have focused on the relationship between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions. Dozeman also summarizes these. Many have argued that the Deuteronomy version comes from the Exodus version; though, P clearly edited parts of the Exodus version. Lothar Perlitt, however, takes the opposite view, arguing that the Decalogue originated in Deuteronomy at the end of the monarchy. At a much later point, the Decalogue was placed in Exodus by the Deuteronomistic redactor, which can be seen from the fact that it disrupts the narrative flow in Exodus.⁴⁵⁹ Several scholars accept or have added to Perlitt's theory.⁴⁶⁰ However, some see the

⁴⁵⁵ This is clear as well with the reappearance of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5. In Deuteronomy, most notably, the motive clause for the Sabbath commandment centering around creation is replaced with the exodus.

For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 83; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 33. Carpenter believes that though the Decalogue received expansion over time, it originated at Sinai. He writes, "The witness of the text should be trusted until proven false" (33).

⁴⁵⁶ Dozeman, 425, 469-470, 474.

⁴⁵⁷ Sigmund Mowinckel, *Le decalogue*, Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse 16 (Paris: Alcan, 1927). Dozeman does not provide page numbers.

⁴⁵⁸ Dozeman, 469-470. citing Albrecht Alt, *Essays on the Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966). Dozeman does not provide page numbers.

⁴⁵⁹ Perlitt, 78-99.

⁴⁶⁰ Dozeman cites Eduard Nielsen, *Ten Commandments in New Perspective: A Tradition-Historical Approach*, trans. D. Burke, Studies in Biblical Theology 2/7 (London: SCM, 1968), 84-85; Ernest Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986); Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 189 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), 49-50, 93-97; Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19-40*, Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 2004). For Nicholson and Dohmen, Dozeman does not provide page numbers.

Exodus Decalogue as entirely written by P.⁴⁶¹ Several scholars have also argued against Perlitt's hypothesis.⁴⁶² For example, Christoph Levin believes the Exodus version came first, because shorter versions usually precede longer versions.⁴⁶³ At the very least, most scholars believe the Sabbath commandment in Exod 20:8-11 was written by P.⁴⁶⁴ Dozeman's own view, as noted above, is that the Decalogue originated as non-P material, but received a P edit, particularly with the Sabbath commandment.

Typical of a historical commentary, Dozeman maps the history of composition of the Decalogue, from its origin to its present form in Exodus, and surveys the history of scholarship of the Decalogue. The former is the nature of a historical commentary, while the latter is done to give readers a sense of how scholars have interpreted the Decalogue over the past few hundred years, and where the field currently stands.

⁴⁶¹ Dozeman cites Frederick Winnett, *The Mosaic Tradition*, Near and Middle East Series 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1949), 30-42, John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 248-52; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, *Der Dekalog: Seine Späten Fassungen, die originale Komposition und seine Vorstufen*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 45 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1982), 21-16.

⁴⁶² Dozeman cites Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:10-11; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 243, 290-91; Axel Graupner, "Zum Verhältnis der beiden Dekalogfassungen Ex 20 und Dtn 5," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (1987): 308-29; William Johnstone, "The Decalogue and the Redaction of the Sinai Pericope in Exodus," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 100 (1988): 361-85; William Johnstone, *Chronicles and Exodus: An Analogy and Its Application*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplementary Series 275 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 168-97.

⁴⁶³ Christoph Levin, "Der Dekalog am Sinai," *Vetus Testamentum* 35 (1985): 165-97.

⁴⁶⁴ Dozeman, 470-472. See also Coggins, 75-77, 79; Scarlata, 158. Coggins proposes the possibility that prophetic critiques like Hos 4:1-2 were influential in eventually creating the Decalogue as a law code, perhaps some time during the Second Temple period; though, clearly at least some of the laws in the Decalogue originated from much earlier. For an interpretation that contrasts with the exegesis above, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 36-37. Carpenter takes a biblical-canonical approach to the text, arguing that the Decalogue was never separate from the Sinai narrative. They were together from the beginning, and can only be understood completely when they are together.

2.6.3 Grammatical Notes for the Decalogue

Similar to exegetical commentaries, historical commentaries also generally offer extensive notes on the grammar and translation of individual words and phrases.

Dozeman's work draws on parallel words and phrases throughout the OT and other ancient translations (e.g., Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX), in addition to ANE cognates, and the work of other scholars.

Exod 20:3. The lack of a *soph pasuq* at the end of the verse in the MT can be taken to mean that Exod 20:3-6 should be read as a single commandment. The same commandment in Deut 5:7 does have a *soph pasuq*.

Exod 20:4. The word פֶּסֶל (“carved image”) comes from the root פָּסַל (“to carve”). The noun פֶּסֶל most likely designates cultic images.⁴⁶⁵

Exod 20:6. The phrase וְעֲשֵׂהָ חֶסֶד (“but showing steadfast love”) translates literally as “and doing steadfast love.”⁴⁶⁶ The verb עֲשֵׂה is usually used for Yahweh's actions with humans, which allows for the translation “showing” here.

The translation of the phrase לְאֶלְפֵי־יָמִים, “to the thousandth generation” is not technically following the original Hebrew, which states “to the thousands.”

Exod 20:7. The meaning of the verb הִשָּׂא (“to lift up”) is not readily apparent. The meaning may have to do with swearing in God's name.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁵ See its use in Lev 26:1 and Deut 27:15. For similar interpretations, see Bailey, 219; Garrett, 470, n. 2; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28; Motyer, 232.

⁴⁶⁶ See also Bruckner, 183. Bruckner believes a more accurate translation is “unrelenting love” and can be contrasted with אֱהָב (human love). This unrelenting love “includes God's everlasting loyalty to the promises and commitments God made to the people, even when one generation or another fails to respond to that love” (183).

⁴⁶⁷ Dozeman is following Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, 278-279. Weinfeld refers the reader to Exod 23:1; Ps 15:3; 139:20.

The noun לִפְנוּיָא (“in vain”) means “emptiness” in Hebrew. It may be, as Houtman suggests, that the word has to do with “deception” or “falsity.”⁴⁶⁸

The verb יָנַקָה (“acquit”) gives the sense of being “free” or “clear.” The LXX’s καθαρίση also carries this sense.⁴⁶⁹

Exod 20:8. The term verb זָכֹר (“remember”) is an infinitive absolute with an imperative force. The Samaritan Pentateuch has *šmwr*, which is the same as the version in Deut 5:12.

Exod 20:10. The list “you, and your son, and your daughter, your male slave, and your female slave, and your cattle,” includes ὁ βοῦς σου καὶ τὸ ὑποζύγιόν σου (“your ox and your ass”) in the LXX.

The phrase וְגֵרְךָ (“and your resident alien”) is προσήλυτος (“proselyte”) instead in the LXX. The phrase אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ (“who is in your gates”) is paraphrased with ὁ παρικοῶν ἐν σοί (“residing among you”) in the LXX.⁴⁷⁰

2.6.4 The Prologue: Exod 20:2

Dozeman observes that God introduces God’s self with “I am Yahweh,” which is a standard formula for deities in the ANE. The purpose of the introduction is to make clear that the divine name Yahweh is revealing the Decalogue to Israel. After, “I am Yahweh,” God states that Israel is God’s own (“your God”), which is justified by God’s

⁴⁶⁸ Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1 of Historical Commentary of the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok, 1993), Exod 3:36.

For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44; Larsson, 145.

⁴⁶⁹ For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 29, n. 128.

⁴⁷⁰ All grammatical notes from Dozeman, 467-468. For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 29, n. 135.

previous saving action: “I brought you out of the land of Egypt,” a phrase known also as the “exodus motif.” Up to now, the exodus motif was the foundation for two cultic laws (Feast of Unleavened Bread in Exod 13:3-10 and the firstborn in Exod 13:11-16). Now, it becomes the foundation for the Decalogue. Altogether, the prologue shows that freedom from Egyptian slavery is essential to knowing God’s name. This concept is first introduced in Exod 1:15-21, with the entrance of Yahweh as the God of the Hebrews in the midwives pericope. Meanwhile, the prologue depicts Egypt as the “house of slavery.”⁴⁷¹

In this section, Dozeman connects redemption to Law, noting that the former must precede the latter. However, unlike the other commentators, Dozeman does not use terms like “grace,” “salvation,” or “gratitude”; in addition, he voices no explicit concern about how *Christians* should understand this connection. Dozeman apparently works hard not to couch redemption or its connection to Law in Christian terms. This would contradict his attempt to access the original meaning.⁴⁷² Nevertheless, a reader could certainly extrapolate the relation between Law and salvation from Dozeman’s commentary.

2.6.5 First Commandment: Exod 20:3

The first commandment, Dozeman contends, presumes the existence of other gods and the prevalence of henotheism throughout the biblical world.⁴⁷³ In this henotheistic

⁴⁷¹ Dozeman, 479-480. The concept reappears throughout Deuteronomy (see Deut 5:6; 6:12; 7:8; 8:14; 13:5, 10), and other parts of the Hebrew Bible (see Josh 24:17; Mic 6:1-8; Jer 34:8-22). It becomes the foundation for singular devotion to God, social ethics, justice, and the Jubilee law.

⁴⁷² Whether the other commentators do cause such a disruption in their use of terms like “grace,” “salvation,” or “gratitude” will be left to the reader to decide.

⁴⁷³ Deuteronomy reinforces the argument for the existence of a henotheistic context when it states that gods have been appointed to other nations (Deut 29:26; see also Deut 8:19; 13:2, 7, 13; 17:3; 18:20).

context, Exod 20:3 commands monolatry, or undivided devotion to Yahweh. This is justified by God's redemption of Israel, as stated in the prologue.⁴⁷⁴ It turns out, the ramification of redemption is not absolute freedom, but the "transference" of slavery from Pharaoh to God. God now has exclusive possession of Israel, which is also part of what it means to be God's treasured possession.⁴⁷⁵ The syntax of the commandment is intriguing, in that there is no imperative verb. The Hebrew literally states, "There will not be to you... other gods before my face."⁴⁷⁶ Some scholars take this to mean that v. 3 is not a commandment, and instead, introduces the commandment in vv. 4-6.⁴⁷⁷ The phrase "other gods" makes the commandment broad, encompassing any "rival deity" to God.⁴⁷⁸

The phrase *עַל־פָּנַי* ("before my face") gives the sense that the commandment presumes one is in God's presence in a worship context.⁴⁷⁹ For example, at Yahweh's sanctuary, one can only worship God alone. However, "before my face" can also mean the land in which God reigns, among other possibilities.⁴⁸⁰ Some translations seek to capture a broader meaning for the commandment by translating the phrase *עַל־פָּנַי* as "beside me," or "over against me," or "above me," or "except me."⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁴ See also Coggins, 78. Coggins believes Israel did not become monolatrous until around the sixth century BCE.

⁴⁷⁵ See Exod 19:5. For a similar interpretation, see Larsson, 127, 136.

⁴⁷⁶ Dozeman, 480. See also Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 27. Johnstone notes that the Hebrew construction, if translated literally, sounds awkward in English. However, by using *היה*, a verb that is also at the root of Yahweh's name, the commandment sets up a deep contrast between Yahweh and other gods.

⁴⁷⁷ See also Larsson, 143. Larsson observes that if one translates v. 3 as "you will have no other gods before me," it could be taken as the "consequence of knowing the Lord." In other words, "If you know who I am and what I have done for you, then you will not have other gods before me" (143).

⁴⁷⁸ Dozeman, 480-481. The phrase is relatively common, used eighteen times in Deuteronomy, twenty in DH, and eighteen in Jeremiah. The Targums, along with some modern interpreters, prefer "another god" as the translation, which helps preclude the possibility that there are other gods.

⁴⁷⁹ See Job 1:12; Isa 1:12; 1 Sam 1:22; Zec 8:21-22; Deut 16:16.

⁴⁸⁰ See 1 Sam 26:20.

⁴⁸¹ Dozeman, 481-482. For similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 27, n. 118.

Unlike the other commentators, Dozeman assumes Exod 20:3 addresses henotheism and leaves little room for debate. This is not terribly surprising for an approach that heavily utilizes higher criticism. He also offers an interpretation that might be shocking to a modern Protestant reader: that Israel's servitude is transferred from Egypt to God. A common reading, as exemplified by the commentators above, presumes that God frees Israel from slavery, aligning well with liberal democratic notions that underpin much of Protestantism. Dozeman's historical approach also locates the commandment specifically as applying to a worship context; however, his extension of the commandment to the land in which God reigns leaves open the opportunity for extrapolation to a modern context: since God rules over all creation, the commandment applies everywhere.

2.6.6 Second Commandment: Exod 20:4-6

The importance of the second commandment, Dozeman argues, is communicated through its length. It prohibits three actions ("make," "bow down," and "worship") and two kinds of depictions (both *פֶּסֶל*, or "idol," and *תְּמוּנָה*, or "form"), and includes a motive clause, "For I Yahweh, your God, am a jealous God."⁴⁸² The law may have originated from an early form of Israelite religion. By the time of the writing of the law codes, sometime between the end of the monarchy and the postexilic period, the commandment became "firmly established" in Israel,⁴⁸³ and took up a special significance during the

⁴⁸² Dozeman, 482.

⁴⁸³ See Exod 34:17; Deut 4:16, 23, 25; 27:15; Lev 26:1 for other appearances of the commandment.

exilic period, when idolatry was particularly contagious.⁴⁸⁴ It may also be that the commandment originally had a shorter form (possibly “You shall not make for yourself an idol”).⁴⁸⁵ If this is true, then one might see in the length of the second commandment a developing history of attempts to thwart idolatry: a commandment that originally prohibited making a פֶסֶל (“idol”) over time included תְּמוּנָה (“form” or “representation”), in addition to “bowing down” and “worshiping.” Finally, a motive clause was added, describing the jealousy of God and consequences for breaking the commandment.⁴⁸⁶

The word פֶסֶל has a specific definition (there are other terms for other kinds of idols). The noun פֶסֶל is related to the verb פָסַל, which means “to cut.”⁴⁸⁷ The specific meaning of פֶסֶל, then, is a “carved image” or “idol” that represents a deity, made out of wood or stone. These types of representations could also be encased in gold or silver. The term for this kind of representation is “molten image.”⁴⁸⁸

There are two particular “ambiguities” in the second commandment.⁴⁸⁹ First, it is not entirely clear how פֶסֶל (“idol”) is related to תְּמוּנָה (“form”). While the former is an

⁴⁸⁴ See Jer 10:1-16; 51:17; Isa 40:19-20; 44:9-20; Hab 2:18.

⁴⁸⁵ This is the view of Nielsen, *Ten Commandments*, 84-85.

⁴⁸⁶ Dozeman, 482-483. For similar interpretations, see Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 30-32; Mackay, 344-345. Johnstone theorizes that the motive clause was written during the exile (post-587 BCE), where the ideas it conveys served as a theodicy for cross-generational suffering: the idolatry of the past led to exile in the present, not just for one, but multiple generations. Johnstone notes that Deuteronomy’s version of the Decalogue has a conjunction between “sons” and “third generation.” This seems to convey Deuteronomy’s position that the exile would end after the fourth generation. In contrast, Exodus’ version, which was modified by P, removes the conjunction, giving the sense that the end of the exile is yet to be determined: the parents’ iniquity will spread to the children, to the third and fourth generation, and perhaps beyond. In light of this, Johnstone argues that what the motive clause is conveying is not an image of a scrupulous God who tallies every infraction and distributes punishments accordingly. Rather, the motive clause is describing what life is like: it provides an explanation for the hardships one faces. Johnstone adds that to him, the text is not clear: does the cross-generational punishment apply only to the current generation or to future generations as well?

⁴⁸⁷ See its appearance and use in Exod 34:1, 4; Deut 10:1, 3; 1 Kgs 5:17.

⁴⁸⁸ Dozeman, 483. See Deut 27:15.

⁴⁸⁹ Dozeman discusses a few other difficulties, but since these are similar to other interpretations above, they are noted above, but not discussed here.

actual object, the latter is not. Rather, תמונה is a “template” for an object.⁴⁹⁰ In Exod 20:4, the template applies to any creature in the sky, land, or water. The meaning is much clearer in Deut 5:8,⁴⁹¹ the parallel commandment in Deuteronomy’s Decalogue. Here, the conjunctive ו is missing before תמונה, which places תמונה in apposition to פסל, or renders it as a further explanation of פסל. In effect, in Deuteronomy, a פסל cannot be in any תמונה (“form”) similar to creatures in the sky, land, or water. However, since the ו exists in Exod 20:4, the meaning is that two things cannot be made: idol *and* form.⁴⁹² It may be that the ו has no special significance. However, if it is meant to, then it seems likely that Exod 20:4 was written as a development of Deut 5:8. The inclusion of the ו is to indicate that both idols and representational art of any kind are forbidden.⁴⁹³

Second, it is not entirely clear what the biblical text means by stating that God is קנן (“jealous”) in v. 5. The word קנן in the Hebrew Bible appears in the context of marital relations, passion, and love and is typically the emotion one feels when one suspects one’s spouse has committed adultery.⁴⁹⁴ Such jealousy is emotionally charged and can include violent behavior. Should one presume God’s relationship with Israel should be understood in martial terms such as these? It is the case that marriage and adultery are used to describe Israel’s unfaithfulness to God in Hosea.⁴⁹⁵ From this, it is possible that a marriage context is what Exod 20:5 has in mind. If so, then God’s jealousy is emotionally charged and possibly violent, and is sparked when Israel worships other

⁴⁹⁰ See Num 12:8; Ps 17:15; Deut 4:12, 15; Job 4:16.

⁴⁹¹ See also Deut 4:16, 23, 25.

⁴⁹² For a similar interpretation, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28, n. 120.

⁴⁹³ Dozeman, 483-484.

⁴⁹⁴ See Num 5:11-31; 25:11.

⁴⁹⁵ Hos 2:7, 10-14; 9:15.

gods or makes idols or forms.⁴⁹⁶ The terms לְשׂנְאֵי (“who hate me”) and לְאַהֲבָי (“who love me”), then, would continue the metaphor of marriage: those who break the commandment “hate” God, and those who keep it “love” God.⁴⁹⁷ The term שָׁנָא in its most basic sense means “forced separation,”⁴⁹⁸ and can be found in various contexts, including laws involving divorce.⁴⁹⁹ The sense of divorce may be what the motive clause has in view in employing the term שָׁנָא. If so, worshiping other gods is an act of divorce from Yahweh. This causes a “contagious” and collective עֲוֹן (“guilt”) that leads to God’s פְּקָד (“divine vengeance”) that lasts for four generations, either literally or symbolically (i.e., the course of one’s life).⁵⁰⁰ As for לְאַהֲבָי, the meaning is that human love leads to God’s דֶּסֶד (“love”). Put another way, marital devotion on Israel’s part causes “still further love” from God.⁵⁰¹

The first half of Dozeman’s commentary on the second commandment revolves around a historical analysis of the development of the commandment. Dozeman’s investigation has some stunning implications for a modern reader. The slow expansion of the commandment reveals the pernicious nature of idolatry. In addition, Exodus shows that *all* representational art can become problematic in its expansion of Deuteronomy’s singular prohibition of idols. Notable, as well, is Dozeman’s treatment of the motive clause. While the other commentators attempt to lessen or downplay the severity of the clause or describe it in naturalistic terms, Dozeman attempts to make the clause

⁴⁹⁶ For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 41-42; Coggins, 78-79. Carpenter is careful to state that the hatred God feels is directed specifically to the desire Israel has to worship other gods.

⁴⁹⁷ For uses of the term in the context of marriage and God, see Gen 24:67; 29:18; Ps 18:1; 33:23. See also Deut 7:9; 11:1; 19:9; 30:6, 16.

⁴⁹⁸ E.g., Gen 26:27; Judg 11:7.

⁴⁹⁹ See Deut 22:13-16; 24:3.

⁵⁰⁰ For the symbolic understanding of four generations, see Job 42:16.

⁵⁰¹ Dozeman, 485-486.

understandable *from God's perspective*. He does this by analyzing closely the meaning of *šqr* and its role in a marriage context. The hatred and forced separation caused by the idolater goes a long way in helping one understand why the motive clause is so severe.

2.6.7 Third Commandment: Exod 20:7

Knowing a name in the ANE, Dozeman states, can give access to and power over both people and deities.⁵⁰² It is interesting, then, that God gives God's own name to Israel at the beginning of Exodus. The meaning of this name unfolds over the course of the book. Up to Sinai, the Israelites came to see that God's name can destroy Egypt and heal Israel. Now, at Sinai, through the revelation of the Decalogue, the Israelites learn that the name saves, requires monolatry, and bars representations of God. The third commandment teaches the Israelites that the name is powerful and can be used to harm others if not employed properly. The switch from first to third person in the third commandment helps convey the distance that exists between Israel and Yahweh. God's distance, otherwise known as holiness, should not be taken lightly.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² For examples, Dozeman points to the *Enuma Elish* which discusses the fifty names of the god Marduk that one can use to gain access to the god. The name of Jesus operates in a similar way in Christianity. The giving of his name allows Christians to come into contact with God through prayer. See also Gen 32:22-32, the story in which Jacob wrestles a divine messenger at night. The result is that the messenger learns Jacob's name through a trick, thereby gaining power over Jacob, and then proceeds to change Jacob's name to Israel. Jacob tries to learn the messenger's name but is unsuccessful. As a result, he is not able to gain power over the messenger. See Dozeman, 486.

For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 90; Mackay, 348; Larsson, 145. Ashby states that the mere invocation of God's name does not mean something will or will not happen as one desires. He relates this to Christian life: when one prays, one should allow God to decide how God will answer the prayer, rather than think that one can control God through the invocation of God's name.

⁵⁰³ Dozeman, 486-487. For a similar interpretation, Page, 84-85. See also Ryken, 537-538. For Ryken, the reason why God switches to the third person is to underscore God's covenantal name: Yahweh—which captures God's identity and essence. This name must be treated with proper deference; thus, the need to underscore it.

The term **הָשָׁא** (“lift up”) probably has to do with oath making. Using a deity’s name in an oath was common in the ANE. An example might be, “May God judge me, if what I say is not true.”⁵⁰⁴ The term **הָשָׁא** combined with **לְשׁוֹן** (“in vain”) can be taken to mean a prohibition on “swearing falsely in a legal setting.”⁵⁰⁵ However, **שׁוֹא** has a broader semantic range.⁵⁰⁶ It seems the commandment also includes using God’s name for evil, magical purposes. If one breaks this commandment, God will not “acquit” or let one “go free of punishment.”⁵⁰⁷

Dozeman is by far the most circumspect in his interpretation of Exod 20:7. He limits the application of the commandment only to what he sees possible from his analysis of the ANE context and the semantic range of **שׁוֹא**. The historical approach Dozeman takes in his commentary makes this move unsurprising. One cannot help but gather from Dozeman’s interpretation that the commandment really is limited to oaths, magic, and other misuses akin to these.

2.6.8 Fourth Commandment: Exod 20:8-11

The fourth commandment, Dozeman observes, is composed of three elements: the commandment itself to sanctify the Sabbath, directions on how to fulfill the commandment, and the rationale for the commandment. Exodus’ P version of the

⁵⁰⁴ Dozeman, 487.

⁵⁰⁵ Dozeman, 487.

⁵⁰⁶ See Ps 12:3; 31:6.

⁵⁰⁷ Dozeman, 487-488. For similar interpretations, see Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44; Garrett, 477; Gowan, 88; J. Janzen, 148; W. Janzen, 257; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Larsson, 145; Pokrifka, 222; Ryken, 539-540; Scarlata, 162; Wiersbe, 111. Johnstone makes clear that *only* God will distribute the punishment. Pokrifka states one can legitimately use God’s name in an oath, so long as one’s oath is truthful. For biblical examples, Pokrifka points to Gen 24:2-9; 31:53; Jer 4:2; Deut 6:13; Ps 63:11; Jer 12:16.

commandment diverges in significant ways from the Deuteronomy version.⁵⁰⁸ While Exodus uses “remember,” Deuteronomy uses “observe.” The significance is that for Deuteronomy, memory is a *human* obligation: Israel must remember its salvation history, the exodus story.⁵⁰⁹ Remembering this story will compel Israel to observe the commandment.⁵¹⁰ In contrast, God’s memory and Israel’s memory in Exodus work together. God is stirred to action to free Israel when God remembers the covenant with Israel.⁵¹¹ Israel, in turn, is commanded to help God remember, for example, by wearing the breastplate of the priests⁵¹² and blowing trumpets.⁵¹³ Israel is also commanded to assist God by remembering the exodus,⁵¹⁴ the Sabbath rest every week and during the Day of Atonement,⁵¹⁵ and the separation of the laity from the priests.⁵¹⁶

The directions for the correct observance of the Sabbath delineate which people and animals must rest on the Sabbath and when the Sabbath will occur. The Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the directions are almost completely identical. This rest occurs on the seventh day (i.e., Saturday, according to the Israelite cultic calendar). The ways in which one should rest, however, are not explicitly indicated. It is clear, though, that the commandment has in mind the Land as the site of practice. The command is directed to

⁵⁰⁸ Dozeman notes all of the differences in a table on p. 489 of his commentary.

C.f. Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35. Johnstone argues that Deuteronomy’s version of the Sabbath commandment represents the commandment’s original justification: the exodus from Egypt. Exodus’ Decalogue was written by D, which was changed at some point by P. The result is that the Sabbath now has two justifications: the covenant, relating to the exodus (Deuteronomy), and the universe, relating to creation (Exodus).

⁵⁰⁹ God is requested to remember only once in Deuteronomy (see Deut 9:27).

⁵¹⁰ This is in addition to the other commandments, statutes, words of Torah, and covenant (see Deut 6:2, 17; 7:22; 17:19; 29:9).

⁵¹¹ See Exod 2:24; 6:5. See other P examples in Gen 8:1; 9:15-16; Lev 26:42.

⁵¹² See Exod 28:12, 29.

⁵¹³ See Num 10:9-10.

⁵¹⁴ See Exod 12:14; 30:16.

⁵¹⁵ See Exod 20:8; Lev 23:24.

⁵¹⁶ Dozeman, 488-490. See Num 17:5.

an owner of property and moves outward to the immediate family, slaves, domestic animals (Deuteronomy states specifically that these are ox and ass),⁵¹⁷ and resident aliens (Deuteronomy includes a concern for the slaves, that they should rest just like property owners).⁵¹⁸

According to the Hebrew Bible, the Sabbath was established during creation itself. It was forgotten after the flood, Dozeman states, and then slowly returns in five stages: in the giving of manna every week in the wilderness of Shur,⁵¹⁹ in its giving as a commandment at Sinai,⁵²⁰ in its description as an eternal covenant,⁵²¹ in its appearance and elaboration during the covenantal renewal,⁵²² and in its further elaboration to Moses in the wilderness.⁵²³

Outside of this biblical narrative, the Sabbath has mysterious origins. It may have derived from a Babylonian practice (*sab/pattu*), where people rested every full moon.⁵²⁴

⁵¹⁷ Deut 5:14.

⁵¹⁸ Dozeman, 490.

⁵¹⁹ Exod 16:22-26. For a similar interpretation, see Currid, 42; Pokrifka, 223. Currid states that the Sabbath was established with creation, continued in the wilderness, and was “definitively inscribed in stone” with the Decalogue (42).

⁵²⁰ Exod 20:8-11.

⁵²¹ Exod 31:12-17.

⁵²² Exod 34:1-9; 35:3.

⁵²³ Dozeman, 490-491. Num 15:32-41. The rhythm of seven in the Sabbath observance becomes the pattern for other liturgical observances in P: the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Feast of Booths last seven days; seven feasts exist in total; in the seventh month are the three most important feasts (the New Year, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths); and the Jubilee Year occurs on the fiftieth year (a product of $7 \times 7 + 1$).

For similar interpretations, see Motyer, 233; Harman, 217; Pokrifka, 223-224.

⁵²⁴ For similar interpretations, see Ashby, 90; Bailey, 221; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 332; Motyer, 233.

For interpretations that contrast with the exegesis above, see Alexander, 102; Bailey, 221-222; Bruckner, 185; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44, 46; Currid, 42; Garrett, 477; Gilbert and Stallman, 50-51; Motyer, 233; Pokrifka, 223; Roper, 328-329; Scarlata, 163. Pokrifka argues against the theory that Israel took the Sabbath concept from another culture. The way in which Israel understands it as an imitation of God, and its application for all people, their animals, and their land, makes it uniquely Israelite. It may actually be that other cultures learned the Sabbath from Israel. Carpenter states that both Exodus and Deuteronomy’s motive clauses convey that the rationale for the Sabbath is both creation and exodus. This is what makes the commandment unique, the fact that it is based on specific “theological (creation), historical, and moral-ethical reasons” (46). Motyer states that Sabbath in Israel occurs every seventh day, regardless of the time of the month or the phase of the moon. This suggests that the Sabbath is unique. See

There *is* a connection between Sabbath rest and the full moon in some prophetic passages.⁵²⁵ The weekly practice of the Sabbath seems to have existed at least as far back as the monarchy.⁵²⁶ It appears in Deuteronomy only in the Decalogue and has a more prominent place in P.⁵²⁷ The Sabbath gains even more attention in the exilic and postexilic periods.⁵²⁸ The earliest reference to the Sabbath as a day of worship occurs in the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran.⁵²⁹

Dozeman's analysis of the Sabbath commandment is completely historical in approach. He discusses the relation between the Sabbath commandments in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the day in which the Sabbath occurs, the people and animals to which the commandment applies, and the origin and development of the Sabbath. From his analysis, the role of memory and mutual participation between God and Israel is rife with broader implications: part of Israel's task in following the Sabbath is to remind God of its arrival; in other words, God depends on Israel to remember the Sabbath. In addition, Dozeman's emphasis on the cycle of work and rest that the Sabbath helps build into creation (see footnote 293), a cycle which humanity should align itself with to be in tune with creation, would likely be of special importance (perhaps especially to Presbyterians) who still observe the Sabbath and take it seriously.

also Larsson, 147-148. According to Larsson, the closest parallel to the Sabbath in the ANE is the Akkadian practice of dividing fifty consecutive days into seven, and designating each seventh day as unlucky. This is the exact opposite understanding of the biblical view of the Sabbath, which does not see the seventh day as luckless, but a blessing.

⁵²⁵ See Am 8:4-7; Hos 2:11-15; Isa 1:10-14.

⁵²⁶ See Exod 23:10-12; 2 Kgs 4:23; Am 8:5; Hos 2:11.

⁵²⁷ See Lev 23:3; Num 28:9-10.

⁵²⁸ See Jer 17:19-27; Ezek 20:8-26; 46:1-12; Isa 56:2, 6; 58:13; 66:23; Neh 13:15-22.

⁵²⁹ Dozeman, 491-492. For similar interpretation, see Coggins, 80.

2.7 CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the overall goal of this project is not to underscore aspects of evangelical scholarship that are critically deficient and in need of revision. This project presumes that evangelical scholarship, as a whole, is sound. Rather, the goal is to discover ways in which evangelical insights on the Decalogue might be strengthened, complemented, and even challenged by comparing it with other commentaries, which possess their own distinct methods and presuppositions.

As we enter the rabbinic world, we will find that very few of the methods and presuppositions held by evangelicals are shared, or held in the same way, among the rabbis. To name only a few pertinent examples, (1) the rabbis believed the text was written for them, directly. While evangelical commentators also feel this identification with the text, they also approach the text with a historical consciousness and believe the text was written for an “original audience” for whom it had an “original meaning,” a concept foreign to the rabbis.⁵³⁰ (2) It may seem obvious upon mentioning, but it is essential to emphasize nonetheless that the rabbis did not turn to the NT for insight on how to apply Hebrew Bible texts to their own lives.⁵³¹ (3) While an evangelical might see a repetition in the text as a matter of emphasis or a product of redaction, a rabbinic reader will assume that each “repetition” is conveying different information.

⁵³⁰ See James Kugel, *How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 14-16.

⁵³¹ Though, it appears there may have been engagements at times with NT texts or themes. See Burton L. Visotzky, *Fathers of the World: Essays in Rabbinic and Patristic Literatures* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995); and Marc Hirshman, *A Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation*, trans. Batya Stein (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). The rabbis, of course, had wide-ranging inner-rabbinic debates, which we will see examples of in the *Mekhilta* chapters.

The similarities and differences in presuppositions and methods lead to interpretations that are both remarkably identical and distinct. For instance, among the general comments about the Decalogue, by far the greatest evangelical concern is the relationship between law and grace. The reason is obvious: the dichotomy between law and grace has been a question since the time of the reformers. Many of the commentators adopt a covenantal nomist position, and attempt to find a place for both law and grace in the concept of covenant, arguing that by grace, God redeems Israel from Egypt. Upon this foundation, God establishes a relationship with Israel, in which Israel has a special privilege and task to display God's holiness to the world. This is done through particular concrete actions, as set out by the Law. The *Mekhilta* also expresses a concern about the relationship between law and grace, but approaches it through a parable. Many of the evangelical commentators argue that God's redemption of Israel gives God the right to impose commandments on Israel. Some of these commentators also argue that Israel had the freedom to accept or deny God's proposal of a covenant. While the *Mekhilta* would agree with both of these interpretations, it emphasizes a kind of mutuality in God and Israel's relationship that is not fully explored in the evangelical commentaries.

Turning to the commandments themselves, v. 3 (other gods) raises two particular concerns among the evangelical commentators. The first has to do with the existence of other gods. This is a difficult notion for two reasons. On the one hand, it opens the possibility that Israel experienced a development or change in its theology, from henotheism/monolatry to monotheism. Such a possibility could disrupt a presumption about biblical religion. If Israel's understanding of the divine could alter that drastically, or if the Bible's theology could at one point have been incorrect in such a dramatic way,

one's confidence in the biblical witness could diminish. On the other hand, it opens the possibility that other gods *do* exist. This challenges one of the central tenets of Christian faith: an unequivocal affirmation of monotheism. In light of these issues, one can see why the phrase *עַל-פָּנָי* receives so much attention. One's choice of translation, as Stuart notes, can have serious ramifications. The second issue has to do with the contemporary significance of the commandment. Monotheism is presumed among evangelicals. What, then, is the relevance or importance of the commandment today? Here, some commentators become creative with their answers, turning to various ideologies, affiliations, comforts, or desires as possible infractions of the commandment. While the *Mekhilta* does not enter into the debate on monotheism vs. henotheism/monolatry, it shares the evangelical effort to deny that the commandment affirms the existence of other gods. Its solution to the issue moves in a similar direction to the evangelical commentaries, and offers even further possibilities of what the "other gods" are and how the commandment might apply to people in the present.

For vv. 4-6 (idolatry), three primary concerns come to the fore among evangelicals. The first centers on religious images. The answers to whether such images are prohibited for Christians follows denominational lines. Grammar plays a central role, as does the relationship between v. 3 and vv. 4-6 (i.e., whether there is one commandment or two). While the grammatical and numerical issues by themselves are intriguing, they seem to garner special attention because they relate to broader doctrinal and denominational concerns. In the *Mekhilta*, we will find a strong challenge that rejects images of any kind, built on an extremely close reading of the text. While members of the Reformed tradition will likely be emboldened in some ways by the *Mekhilta*'s exegesis,

the vast majority of evangelicals will be given a worthwhile challenge to their exegesis of vv. 3-6.

The second concern with vv. 4-6 has to do with the matter of נָקָמָה. If God is perfect, and for some, even immutable, then how could God be capable of jealousy? For many of the commentators, the metaphor of marriage seems to offer the most satisfying answer. The metaphor is not only comprehensible, but it speaks to an evangelical emphasis on intimacy with God.⁵³² The *Mekhilta* is also concerned with attributing jealousy to God. One of its solutions is to describe the way in which God enacts punishment on those who break the commandment as “zealous,” which then leads to a discussion on why God allows many idolaters to go unpunished, a question, the *Mekhilta* shows, worth pondering in light of v. 5’s potent motive clause.

The third concern addresses the notion of cross-generational punishment. Most commentators find its plain sense meaning disturbing, if not reprehensible. How can a just God punish an innocent person? One solution that many of the commentators craft offers a useful challenge to an evangelical emphasis on individualism and assumption about atonement. One might think that one’s relationship with God is an individual affair; moreover, one might believe that one’s sins, if forgiven, will cease to have negative consequences. However, as the motive clause indicates, in fact, we are all interconnected, and our actions, good or ill, have an effect on those around us, whether we like it or not. Other commentators argue that the severity of the punishment must be contrasted with God’s true desire to bless those who keep the commandment. While the *Mekhilta* has resonance with the second solution, the *Mekhilta* also exposes a technicality in the motive

⁵³² For some, it may also speak to a conception of patriarchal marriage, in which the husband is the “head” or “lord” of the house.

clause that seems to prevent the full application of cross-generational punishment. It also discusses the extent one must be willing to go to be counted among those that love God and keep God's commandments.

For v. 7 (God's name) the biggest concern is its meaning and applicability. Many of the commentators seem dissatisfied with limiting the commandment to false oaths, and seek to expand it to a prohibition on any mistreatment of God's name/essence/reputation. Part of the motivation behind this seems to be a desire to accommodate an inherited tradition of prohibiting frivolous uses of God's name (e.g., phrases such as "Oh my God"). The *Mekhilta*, in contrast, centers its understanding of this commandment only on false oaths. At first glance, one might think the *Mekhilta*'s choice is unnecessarily limiting, but it opens up possibilities for more serious consideration of the meaning of the commandment, and the consequences for violating it.

Finally, for vv. 8-11 (Sabbath) there are three primary concerns among the commentators. The first has to do with the discrepancies between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions of the commandment. Some commentators argue that the versions complement each other, or essentially accomplish the same purpose, or reflect a development or recontextualization of one by the other. The *Mekhilta* also attempts to explain away any possible contradiction between the two versions, but the way in which it proceeds exposes new questions and insights about the nature of revelation itself.

The second has to do with what can and cannot be done on the Sabbath (i.e., what work is actually prohibited and what activities are acceptable or required). Some commentators believe all work should be suspended or only work that is done on the other six days. In the place of work, some argue the day should be conducted in worship,

or leisure, or acts of charity, or all three. The *Mekhilta* offers new ways to think about what constitutes work, rest, and worship.

The third centers on whether the commandment is still binding on Christians. Some of the commentators argue it is. Many, however, believe or observe that many Christians do not. For this second group, one might rightly ask, if the Decalogue has at least some level of authority, why would Christians not practice the Sabbath? Several commentators, whether directly or indirectly, provide an answer, which is informed by the NT and fulfillment theology.⁵³³ Their answers present the Lord's Day as the fulfillment or replacement of the Sabbath. Whether or not one believes the Sabbath or Lord's Day is incumbent on a Christian, the *Mekhilta* provides extensive proposals on how one might understand, practice, and appreciate the Sabbath, which could also be applied to the Lord's Day.

Having surveyed contemporary evangelical commentaries on the Decalogue, we turn next to an exposition of Augustine's exegesis of the Decalogue. From there, we will move into the heart of the dissertation, a commentary of the *Mekhilta*, and a comparison of this midrashic text with Augustine and the evangelical commentators.

⁵³³ The belief that Christ has come to complete/correct what was lacking in the Jewish tradition. See footnote 13.

3.0 AUGUSTINE’S EXEGESIS OF THE DECALOGUE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that Augustine has had one of the most profound impacts—both theologically and exegetically—on Christianity in general, and evangelicalism in particular. Augustine was born in 354 CE.⁵³⁴ He received formal education in Carthage, and began his career teaching rhetoric, first in Tagaste, his hometown, and then in Rome and Milan. He became interested in Manicheanism while in Carthage and remained committed to the tradition for nine years. However, through several factors, including an encounter with Ambrose and his preaching in Milan, Augustine left the Manichean tradition and was baptized in 386. Five years later, he was ordained a priest, and four years after that, he became bishop of Hippo, remaining in that post till his death in 430.

The vast majority of Augustine’s works revolve around controversies. Of the works that reference Exod 20:3-11, only *trin.*, *ench.*, and some of Augustine’s homilies and expositions are not explicitly polemical. Augustine spent much of his early career as a Christian battling Manicheanism and Donatism, the former of which appears throughout Augustine’s interpretations of Exod 20:3-11.⁵³⁵ By 411, Augustine’s

⁵³⁴ For more on Augustine’s life, see his autobiography, Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. I/1 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997); and also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, 45th anniv. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); and Henry Chadwick, *Augustine of Hippo: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵³⁵ These works are *c. Faust.* and *c. Adim.* A description of Manicheanism can be found in footnote 606.

polemical foil became Pelagianism, and this remained his primary focus till the end of his life.⁵³⁶

The purpose of this chapter is to gather and analyze all of Augustine's comments on Exodus 20:3-17.⁵³⁷ As stated in the introduction to the dissertation, the goal is to build a "map" of Augustine's exegesis of the Decalogue,⁵³⁸ which will be juxtaposed with the evangelical and rabbinic maps. Placed together, these maps will indicate points of commonalities and differences between each commentary of the Decalogue, which in turn will help uncover ways in which evangelical insights might be strengthened, complemented, and even challenged.

The chapter is broken up into five major sections. The first discusses Augustine's general comments on the Decalogue. The second through fourth examine one commandment each. The final section provides a synthesis of Augustine's interpretations. As we will come to see, Augustine's diverse interpretations of the first three commandments are, in general, guided by two interrelated approaches. The first is predicated on a distinction between *uti* ("use") and *frui* ("enjoyment"). According to Augustine, all things can be used or enjoyed. Humanity was created to enjoy God. The Decalogue's double commandment of love is designed to guide humanity toward that end. The second is predicated on a notion that the first three commandments require a spiritual interpretation. Each centers on one member of the trinity: the first on the Father,

⁵³⁶ His primary works that reference Exod 20:3-11 in relation to Pelagianism are *spir. et. litt., c. ep. pel., c. Iul., and c. Iul. imp.* A description of Pelagianism can be found on footnote 571.

⁵³⁷ This has been done with the assistance of *Corpus Augustinianum Gissense* 3.

⁵³⁸ Augustine was indeed aware of the Decalogue in Deut 5:6-21; still, his own exegesis concentrates almost exclusively on the Exodus version. See Wilhelm Geerlings, "The Decalogue in Augustine's Theology," in *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (New York: T & T Clark International, 2011), 106-117. Geerlings notes that for Augustine, the Deuteronomy version was composed by Moses to emphasize God's words as already expressed in Exodus.

the second on the Son, and the third on the Holy Spirit. This trinitarian structure is key to understanding Augustine's approach to all three commandments. Together, they instruct one on how to properly love and enjoy God.

In what follows, the analysis of each commandment divides Augustine's comments into themes, noting dates of works and development of thought where relevant. Throughout this chapter, I assume some familiarity with Augustine. To help facilitate the reader's understanding of Augustine and to help contextualize his exegesis, in the footnotes I provide brief descriptions of: his works; the major figures and movements he interacted with; his hermeneutical approaches; and the major theological doctrines and concepts he references. In addition, I discuss representative examples of Augustine's exegesis in the body, while pointing the reader to parallels in the footnotes.

3.2 GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE DECALOGUE

In what follows, I have divided Augustine's general comments on the Decalogue into five sections. Section one discusses the relationship of the Decalogue to the rest of the Law, most especially the double commandment of love; section two delineates Augustine's enumeration of the Decalogue; section three examines the significance of the ceremonial laws for Christians; section four explicates the proper way in which a Christian is to practice the Decalogue; and section five discusses the rewards for observing the Decalogue. At the end of these five sections, I provide a precis of Augustine's interpretations of the first three commandments to help guide the reader through the complexities of Augustine's in-depth comments on each commandment.

3.2.1 Taxonomy of the Law

In s. 248.4-5,⁵³⁹ Augustine calls the Decalogue the “chief thing” (*praecipuum*) contained in the Law given to Moses. He adds in s. 9.7 and 249.3 that the first three commandments were on one tablet and the second seven were on the other tablet that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai.⁵⁴⁰ This division has particular significance, as each commandment, according to Augustine in s. 248.4-5, is categorized under the two greatest commandments in Matt 22:37-40.⁵⁴¹ The first three concern our relationship with God, and stem from the commandment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37).⁵⁴² This is particularly fitting

⁵³⁹ The *Sermones* are a corpus of homilies given by Augustine over the course of several decades, recorded by stenographers with perhaps varying ranges of accuracy, and some of them revised to varying extents by Augustine. Detecting the stenographic accuracy or his revisions, however, is ultimately impossible, as no sermon has been discovered with Augustine’s own revisions of the manuscript. Augustine himself did not anthologize his sermons; this was done by some of his contemporaries, and continued to occur throughout the subsequent centuries. Augustine appears to have preached frequently, especially during liturgical seasons, such as Easter and Christmas. The selection of readings was determined by the season or a previously established custom; however, there are occasions in which Augustine chose his own readings, usually to address particular needs of his community. Augustine chose to focus his sermons on sections of the readings that are difficult to understand or require special attention to avoid misinterpretation—thus skipping over sections that he thought were straightforward. His sermons often centered on complex theological topics he believed concerned his audience, which he attempted to make comprehensible and practical for them. Other than Hippo, Augustine preached in a variety of locations, and was frequently asked to preach wherever he travelled. See Michele Pellegrino, “General Introduction,” in *Sermons I (1-19) on the Old Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/1 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1990), 13-137. All translations of s. 248, including biblical quotes, are from St. Augustine, *Sermons (230-272B) on the Liturgical Seasons*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/7 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993).

S. 248 was delivered during the week of Easter, between 412-416, and centers on Jn 21:1-14.

For parallels to Augustine’s exegesis, see s. 8.4-13, 18; 9.6-7, 14, 16; 179A.3; 249.3; and 250.3; *qu. hept.* Ex. 71 and 140; *ep.* 55.20; *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19; and *c. Faust.* 15.7; 19.18.

⁵⁴⁰ Even though the first three commandments focused on the love of God and the second seven on the love of neighbors are on separate tablets, and even though the second tablet is subordinated to the first, Augustine makes clear that all ten commandments are completely interrelated; they all derive from the same source and were given simultaneously. You cannot do one without the others. See also *f. et. op.* 11, 17.

⁵⁴¹ For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see s. 8.18.

⁵⁴² Augustine turns to Matthew’s gospel for the commandment, although, it is clear Matthew himself is quoting Deut 6:5. Similarly, when Matthew discusses the second greatest commandment (below), Matthew is clearly drawing on Lev 19:18. Matthew brings these two commandments together, identifying them as the two greatest, which Augustine finds useful in his numerology.

because, as Augustine states in *s.* 9.7, God is three. Each commandment, then, refers to one person of the trinity: the first refers to the Father, the second to the Son, and the third to the Holy Spirit. The other seven concern our relationship with each other, and stem from the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). The Decalogue, in this way, draws its existence and significance from the double commandment of love.

The double commandment has special prominence throughout Augustine’s writings. In particular, in *doc. Chr.* 1.20-21, 27-28, 34-40,⁵⁴³ Augustine argues that the entire purpose of the Law and Scripture is to cultivate love, and that the double commandment encompasses all things that humans are commanded to love.⁵⁴⁴ Moreover, he states that the double commandment is the litmus test of proper understanding: one knows one’s interpretation is correct if that interpretation leads to fulfillment of the double commandment. The order of the double commandment is critical. We are to love God first with our whole selves for God’s own sake. Then, we are to love others, but this is neither for our sake or theirs, but for God’s. The reason everything must be for God’s sake is that everything, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, is divided between “use” (*uti*) and “enjoyment” (*frui*). In the former, things are used in order to obtain that which will bring enjoyment. In the latter, only that which is eternal, immutable, and

⁵⁴³ The four books of *De doctrina Christiana* were written over the course of thirty years, with book 1-3.25, 35 composed in 396 and the rest in 427. The primary aim of the treatise is twofold: (1) explication of the proper methods of interpreting Scripture, and (2) explication of the proper way of teaching Scripture. The first goal is undertaken in books one through three, while the second in book four. Through his work, Augustine communicates that education and study are integral to a Christian life. See Mario Naldini, “Structure and Pastoral Theology of *Teaching Christianity*,” in *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. I/11 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1996), 11-27. For more on Augustine’s comments about love and the double commandment, see *doc. Chr.* 1.20-44.

⁵⁴⁴ Most especially, both the spirit *and* the body, not just the former.

evokes perfect happiness can be enjoyed. If we love a fellow human for his/her own sake, we are saying he/she possesses these three things for us, which of course is not ultimately true, even if we want it to be. Only God is eternal and unchanging, and can bring perfect happiness.⁵⁴⁵ Thus, our true enjoyment can only be in God. All others, then, including oneself, must be loved (i.e., used) for the sake of God.

In s. 9.7, Augustine states that it is not just the Decalogue, but the *whole* Law that is contained in the two greatest commandments. Then, in s. 9.14-16, he states that the two greatest commandments are contained in one: “What you do not want done to you, do not do to another” (Tob 4:15).⁵⁴⁶ Thus, in summary, “that one commandment [Tob 4:15] contains two [Matt 22:37-40], those two contain ten [Exod 20:3-17], those ten contain them all.” By “all,” Augustine means a gamut of laws that relate to the ten, which are so vast that they are almost impossible to count.⁵⁴⁷ Thus, the commandments for Augustine

⁵⁴⁵ Augustine does note, citing Gen 1:26-27, that humans are created in the image of God. This fact creates an interesting question: if humans are created in God’s image, are they to be used, or enjoyed, or a combination of the two? Augustine begins his answer by noting that the *imago dei* is in reference to our rational souls, not our bodies. He then sets up two conditions: if humans are supposed to love each other for their own sake, then humans should be enjoyed; however, if humans are to be loved for the sake of something else, then humans are to be used. After this, Augustine argues that he believes humans should be loved for the sake of something else. Something that is loved for its own sake would instill hope within people for experiencing its full, blissful state in a reality yet to be realized. Humans cannot instill this kind of hope, and as Jer 17:5 states, no one should place his/her hope in humans. Thus, Augustine concludes, humans are not to be enjoyed. See *doc. Chr* 22, 20.

⁵⁴⁶ All translations of s. 9, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/1.

Augustine explains that “What you do not want done to you, do not do to another” in Tob 4:15 applies to both humans and God in s. 9.15-16. He apparently felt that his listeners might object to his argument that Tob 4:15 applies to both, believing that it only applies to humans. Augustine argues that God is a being like any human in that if you sin, you are doing something to God that God would not want done.

It is worth noting that Hillel gives a similar teaching to Tob 4:14 in b. Shabbat 31a.

In s. 179A.3, 5, instead of Tob 4:15, Augustine turns to Rom 13:10 as the one commandment that contains all others. Here, Paul states “The fullness of the law is charity.” Augustine understands Rom 13:10 to mean that “charity is the root of all good works.” If charity is to be perfect, there cannot be any sin. Thus, any sin damages this root. Augustine reasons from this that because committing any sin, no matter how great or small, damages the root that is charity, anyone who commits any sin becomes guilty of every sin. This is what Jas 2:10 means when it says, “whoever keeps the whole law, but offends in a single point, has become guilty of them all.” Biblical translations from s. 179A are from St. Augustine, *Sermons (148-183) on the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. III/5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1992).

⁵⁴⁷ See s. 179A.3.

can be categorized with levels of generality. Each level draws its existence and significance from the level that precedes it, while each preceding level contains a general law(s) that encompasses the laws that proceed from it.

3.2.2 Enumerating the Decalogue

Augustine states in *s.* 248.4-5 that the Decalogue should be divided in the following way:

1. worshiping one God
2. not taking the Lord's name in vain
3. observing the Sabbath
4. honoring parents
5. not committing adultery
6. not killing
7. not stealing
8. not bearing false witness
9. not coveting a neighbor's wife
10. not coveting a neighbor's goods

In *qu. hept.* Ex. 71,⁵⁴⁸ Augustine defends his enumeration of the Decalogue. He notes that some divide what he considers the first commandment (worshiping one God) into two: (1) worshiping one God, and (2) idolatry. In addition, he notes that some combine what he considers the last two commandments (coveting a wife and property) into one. Such

⁵⁴⁸ The *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* was likely written in 419 CE. Augustine states that he wrote the work out of his own curiosity about the Heptateuch (Genesis through Judges). While reading through each book and comparing it with other manuscripts in the LXX, he wrote down questions about the text. Many questions appear to be spurred by his congregation or other commentators; others were Augustine's own. He answers numerous questions in this work at various lengths; some he leaves unanswered. Augustine is especially concerned with the literal interpretation of the biblical text. He examines historical, philological, textual, and theological issues; his primary focus is not textual criticism though, but pastoral and theological concerns. See Joseph T. Lienhard, "General Introduction," in *Writings on the Old Testament*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. I/14 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2016), xiii-xiv; and Joseph T. Lienhard, "Introduction," in *Writings on the Old Testament*, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. I/14 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2016), 3-5. All translations of *qu. hept.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/14.

people group the first four commandments (worshiping one God through the Sabbath commandment) together into commandments that relate to God; and the other six with commandments that relate to humans. Augustine prefers his division, because the three commandments that relate to God correspond with the Trinity. In addition, he argues that not only is the commandment to worship one God most fully elaborated when it includes the prohibition on idolatry, but the language of Exod 20:4-5 flows most naturally as an elaboration of Exod 20:3. This is not at all the case with the coveting commandment(s). Here, “you shall not covet” is stated twice, once for a wife, and once for property. The repetition of this phrase helps make clear that two different categories are being referred to (wife and property). Scripture also makes this clear when it elaborates what is prohibited in a “neighbor’s house” with “his field nor his servant nor his servant girl nor his cattle nor his beast of burden nor his flock nor anything that belongs to your neighbor.”⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁹ Interestingly, the Hebrew text reads quite differently from what Augustine presents:

לֹא תִחְמַד, בֵּית רֵעֶךָ לֹא-תִחְמַד אִשְׁתּוֹ רֵעֶךָ, וְעַבְדּוֹ וְאִמָּתוֹ וְשׁוֹרֹ וְחֲמֹרֹ, וְכָל, אֲשֶׁר לְרֵעֶךָ
 You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male servant or female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything which is your neighbor’s (translation mine).

It would be difficult to make an argument through syntax that one’s house is elaborated by servants, ox, donkey, etc., as these are connected to the neighbor’s wife with ו (conjunction meaning “and” or “or”). The Vulgate follows the Hebrew text with its word order:

Non concupisces domum proximi tui nec desiderabis uxorem eius, non seruum, non ancillam, non bouem, non asinum, nec omnia quae illius sunt

Augustine, however, only references the Vulgate beginning with Deuteronomy 20 in *qu. hept*, and does not treat it as more authoritative than his other Latin manuscripts (see Lienhard, “Introduction,” 5). In Deut 5:21, the word order parallels Augustine’s: coveting a neighbor’s wife comes first, followed by a neighbor’s house, followed by servants, ox, donkey, etc. Augustine may have followed Deut 5:21 at this point, instead of Exod 20:17 (he does not discuss the discrepancy between the two texts). However, it may also be that Augustine had a version of *Vetus Latina* in which Exod 20:17 has the same word order as Deut 5:21. Admittedly, there is no corroborating evidence, save for Augustine’s s. 8.12, in addition to Caesarius of Arles’ sermon 100.10 (though Caesarius was highly influenced by Augustine).

3.2.3 The Other Commandments in the Old Testament

Beyond the Decalogue, Augustine states in *spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26; and 16,28⁵⁵⁰ that none of the other commandments in the Old Testament apply to Christians. Moses only received the Decalogue from God on Mount Sinai, which was written on stone tablets by the finger of God. By “the finger of God,” Augustine understands the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵¹ All of the other commandments, especially the ceremonial commandments (e.g., animal sacrifices and circumcision), were but foreshadowings of what was revealed and fulfilled in Christ. For example, the commandment to observe the Passover with slaughtering a lamb was a symbol that points to its fulfillment in the passion of Christ.

3.2.4 Proper Observance of the Decalogue

Concerning the proper observance of the Decalogue, Augustine writes in *spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26 that the Sabbath is to be observed spiritually (more on this below),

⁵⁵⁰ The text *De spiritu et littera* was written at the end of 412 CE in response to the Pelagian controversy, prompted by a letter Augustine received from a friend named Marcellinus. In the introduction to the text, Augustine denies a Pelagian view that humans can achieve righteousness without God’s aid, and that humans have free will in following God’s commandments. Augustine counters that one cannot achieve righteousness without the Holy Spirit. The major part of Augustine’s text is split into four parts. Parts one and two contain Augustine’s argument and parts three and four answer possible objections. In part two (which contains the section that interests us: 14,23-24 and 16,28), Augustine explains the distinction between the law of works and the law of faith. The difference between the two laws is one of motivation: in the law of works, we follow the Decalogue out of fear. In the law of faith, we desire to follow the Decalogue out of love of righteousness. See Roland Teske, “*The Spirit and the Letter*: Introduction,” in *Answer to the Pelagians*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/23 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1997), 141-149. All translations of *spir. et litt.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/23.

⁵⁵¹ See Lk 11:20. For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *Io. ev. tr.* 122,8-9.

while the other nine are to be understood and observed in their literal/plain sense.⁵⁵²

However, in *en. Ps* 74.12,⁵⁵³ Augustine appears to offer a different perspective:

The Jewish people received the law; they received just, good commandments. What can be as just as these? *You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not covet your neighbor's property. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall adore one only God, and serve him alone.* All these are the wine. But the material signs sank to the bottom and remained with the Jews, so that the spiritual meaning could be poured out. The *cup in the Lord's hand*—that is, in the Lord's power—is a cup of *pure wine*, because it is a cup of the truthful, unadulterated law. But the cup is *full of a mixed drink*, because it contains the dregs of those material sacraments. When the psalm says, *he humbles one*, it means the proud Jew; when he *exalts another*, the reference is to the confessing Gentile. *He tipped it from one to another*, from the Jewish people to the Gentile races. What did he tip? The law. Its spiritual meaning flowed out, yet *its dregs were not emptied out*, because all the material observances were perpetuated among the Jews.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵² For parallels to Augustine's exegesis, see *c. ep. pel.* 4,10; *ep.* 55.22. See also *doc. Chr.* 3.24.

⁵⁵³ *Enarrationes en Psalmos* was written between 391-422. Augustine set out to explicate every psalm, and ended the project with Psalm 118 [119]. Dating each exposition is a difficult and complicated task, requiring an examination of internal evidence and its relation to Augustine's other works. Only some of the expositions have a consensus around the date. Augustine's expositions on the Psalms are the most extensive of any Church Father. He first came upon the Psalms in 386. Their lasting impression on him is evidenced by the over ten thousand citations of psalms throughout Augustine's corpus. Augustine himself anthologized his expositions, which were written in a diversity of genres, including sermons, brief notes, commentaries, material to assist in preaching, etc. Of the expositions that derive from homilies, some were from homilies delivered during a Mass. A psalm was typically sung between the Old and New Testament readings. However, most of these expositions seem to have come from Vespers and Matins in which psalms were sung. Augustine's exegesis of the Psalms represents some of his most profound theological insights. He interpreted the Psalms in innovative and profound ways. For Augustine, each psalm had a deeper meaning; the goal was to move beyond the literal meaning to that deeper meaning. Augustine believed the psalms were prophetic, serving as symbols of the New Testament reality. Thus, the approach Augustine took toward the psalms was figurative exegesis (see footnote 586). Such an approach was especially necessary, because the Psalms frequently discussed theologies (e.g., anthropomorphisms) and practices (the Israelite cult) that would have been at variance with Augustine's beliefs if they were read only at the literal level (see footnote 675). Nevertheless, Augustine found he could frequently express the New Testament reality without recourse to figurative interpretations. His method was to comment on each psalm verse-by-verse, but to do so with the entire context of the psalm in mind. Augustine made constant reference to other parts of the psalm and the overall direction and meaning of the psalm. See Michael Fiedrowicz, "General Introduction," in *Expositions of the Psalms 1-32*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/15 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2000), 13-66; and Vernon J. Bourke, "Augustine on the Psalms," in *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, ed. Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 55-65.

⁵⁵⁴ All translations of *en. Ps.* 74, including biblical quotes, are from Saint Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms* 73-98, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/18 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2000).

Augustine's comment is generated from Ps 74:9 [75:8]: "For in the Lord's hand is a cup of pure wine, full of a mixed drink. And he tipped it from one to another, yet its dregs were not emptied out. All the sinners of the earth will drink it." In essence, Augustine appears to be arguing that the Law has both a spiritual and material interpretation and application. While Jews possess the material, Christians hold the spiritual. After quoting most of the Decalogue, Augustine writes, "But the material signs sank to the bottom and remained with the Jews, so that the spiritual meaning could be poured out." One might suppose from this that Augustine is arguing that the Decalogue can be interpreted both spiritually *and* materially, and that one should adopt the spiritual interpretation and application. If this is correct, it would contradict what he writes in *spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26 mentioned above—that the nine non-Sabbath commandments should be observed in their literal sense.

However, upon closer examination, it appears Augustine has a much narrower understanding of what constitutes "material signs." Drawing on Ps 74:9, Augustine likens the Law to a cup of wine, which contains two parts, the actual wine and the dregs at the bottom. Many of the commandments in the Law, particularly the ceremonial commandments, have two components: "material signs" (*carnalia*) and "spiritual meaning" (*spiritualis intellectus*). Such commandments also have "material observances" (*sacramenta carnalia*)⁵⁵⁵ and spiritual application. For example, the material sign of

⁵⁵⁵ There are several uses of the term *sacramentum* in Augustine's writings. In this particular instance, Augustine conceives of *sacramenta* as certain cultic practices (like the Sabbath), or culture figures, locations, holidays, etc. that occur in the Old Testament. What makes them *sacramenta* is that they function as signs that point to the full reality found in the New Testament and the Church. For more on Augustine's understanding of the sacraments, see Emmanuel J. Cutrone, "Sacraments," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 741-747.

circumcision refers to the *physical* act of circumcision.⁵⁵⁶ Its material observance is conducted through the cutting away of bodily flesh. Meanwhile, the spiritual meaning of circumcision is the circumcision of the heart. This involves the *spiritual* cutting away of disordered desires.⁵⁵⁷ It is the material signs and observances of commandments such as circumcision that are the dregs.⁵⁵⁸ They sink to the bottom of the cup and continue to be perpetuated among the Jews. Everything else, which includes the moral laws of the Decalogue and the spiritual meaning of the ceremonial commandments, are the wine. Like the wine in the Psalm, these have been poured out for the benefit of sinners. Augustine ends by stating that the sinners who drink the wine (i.e., Christians) have been justified; those who drink the dregs (i.e., Jews) “have lost their significance.”⁵⁵⁹

For Augustine, proper observance of the Decalogue requires not only correct interpretation of the commandments, but the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. In *Io. ev. tr.* 122,8-9,⁵⁶⁰ Augustine sets out to discern the significance of the 153 fish that the

⁵⁵⁶ Augustine provides two other examples: Temple (the physical one in Jerusalem vs. the Body of Christ); and sacrifice (those done at the physical Temple vs. Christ’s). It is from the material that we come to know the spiritual. In other words, the Old Testament is fulfilled by the New Testament. See Howard J. Loewen, “The Use of Scripture in Augustine’s Theology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 213. Or, as Augustine says earlier in *en. Ps.* 74.12, “in the Old Testament the New lies hidden, as though concealed beneath the dregs of sacred signs still in material character.”

⁵⁵⁷ See *spir. et litt.* 8, 13. See also footnote 619 for the relation between disordered desire and Original Sin.

⁵⁵⁸ Augustine refers to these commandments in *en. Ps.* 74.12 as “material sacraments” (*corporaliū sacramentorum*). For more on Augustine’s understanding of *sacramentum*, see footnotes 555 and 675.

⁵⁵⁹ Augustine makes a similar argument in *c. Faust.* 12.11, where he accuses the Jews of *exercet operationem Legis carnaliter* (practicing the Law carnally/materially).

It should also be noted that also in *c. Faust.* 12.9-13 Augustine states that the Jews do still serve a purpose. They continue to observe the commandments carnally, but no longer receive a blessing, because they have refused Christ’s grace. Thus, they serve as an example to the world of what happens when Christ is rejected.

⁵⁶⁰ Together, *tractatus in evangelium Iohannis* is a corpus of 124 exegetical sermons on the Gospel of John. Numbers 1-54 were preached to Augustine’s diverse community of Basilica Pacis in Hippo, and 55-124 were either preached or dictated to a stenographer. Following Marie-Francois Berrouard, the sermons are dated approximately between 406-421 CE. See Marie-Francois Berrouard, “La date des *Tractatus I-LIV in Iohannis Evangelium* de Saint Augustin,” *Recherches Augustiniennes* 7 (1971): 105-168. See also Allan Fitzgerald, “Introduction,” *Homilies on the Gospel of John 1-40*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol.

disciples catch in Jn 21:1-11. Augustine begins by observing that the number 153 can be arrived at by adding the numbers one through 17 together in sequential order.⁵⁶¹ Next, Augustine states that within the number 17 are the numbers 10 and seven. Both of these numbers have a symbolic value: the number 10 signifies the Law, i.e., the Decalogue, and the number seven signifies the Spirit.⁵⁶² Adding the number seven to the number 10 to make 17 symbolizes the Spirit being added to the Law, an action that is necessary for a person to fulfill the Law.⁵⁶³

Drawing on 1 Cor 3:6, Augustine argues that the letter (or Law) on its own kills (or condemns) a person, but the spirit (or Holy Spirit) gives a person life (or salvation). Without the Holy Spirit, the Law “makes transgressors.”⁵⁶⁴ One can try as one might on one’s own, but will ultimately fail in keeping the Law.⁵⁶⁵ With the gracious aid of the Spirit, however, the Law can be observed. But why the Law in the first place? As s. 249 states, the Law is necessary, because it reveals to us how to act, what is right, what is

III/12 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2009), 24-25.

Io. ev. tr. 122 may have been delivered sometime after 419. The sermon centers on Jn 21:1-11, in which the post-resurrection Christ appears to the disciples while they are fishing. Upon observing the disciples’ inability to catch anything, Jesus advises them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat. The disciples follow his instruction and catch so many fish that they cannot pull the load into the boat. After arriving on shore, the disciples find that they have caught one hundred and fifty-three fish.

For parallels to Augustine’s exegesis, see s. 248.5, 249.3, s. 250.3, s. 251.5-6, and s. 270.7.

⁵⁶¹ That is, 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10 + 11 + 12 + 13 + 14 + 15 + 16 + 17.

⁵⁶² Augustine gives several proofs from Scripture that the Spirit is represented by the number seven. During creation, God did not sanctify the first six days, but the seventh. One of the prime activities of the Spirit, of course, is holiness and sanctification. In Isa 11:2-3, the gifts which the Spirit gives (wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, godliness, and fear of God) equals seven. According to Rev 3:1, there are seven spirits, all of which, according to 1 Cor 12:11, come from and are the same Holy Spirit.

⁵⁶³ At this point, Augustine notes briefly that the Father is spirit, and the Son is spirit, on account of the Father. The Spirit of both the Son and Father is the Holy Spirit.

⁵⁶⁴ All translations of *Io. ev. tr.* 122, including biblical quotes, from St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John, 112-24; Tractates on the Epistle of John*, trans. John W. Rettig, vol. 92 of *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1995).

⁵⁶⁵ Augustine may also be referring to Rom 5:20; 7:7-12, and Gal 3:19.

just.⁵⁶⁶ Knowledge alone, though, is not enough. Thus, the letter on its own kills (cf. 2 Cor 3:6): it reveals what is right but gives no further assistance, making a person a transgressor. In this sense, the Law, as *s.* 9.3⁵⁶⁷ and 251 describe, is an opponent, commanding one to do things which one does not desire to do.⁵⁶⁸ But, the Spirit added to the letter gives the Law life. The Spirit fulfills the Law,⁵⁶⁹ brings one into accord with this opponent,⁵⁷⁰ and enables one to use the Law to bring harmony, order, and fulfillment.⁵⁷¹

Returning to numerology, Augustine states that adding each number from one to seventeen together sequentially symbolizes all who have received the Holy Spirit. Together, these numbers equal 153, the exact number of fishes caught by the disciples.

⁵⁶⁶ *S.* 249 was delivered during the week of Easter before 418, and centers on Jn 21:1-14. All translations of *s.* 249, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/7.

⁵⁶⁷ *S.* 9 was delivered around 420 CE, and centers on Exodus 20 and Ps 144:9. All translations of *s.* 9, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/1.

⁵⁶⁸ *S.* 251 was delivered during the Easter Season between 410-416 CE, and centers on Jn 21:1-14. All translations of *s.* 251, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/7.

⁵⁶⁹ For Augustine, this is the meaning of Matt 5:17. Christ comes not to abolish the Law, but fulfill it with the Holy Spirit, adding seven to ten.

⁵⁷⁰ Augustine draws on Matt 5:25, identifying the “opponent” in the text with the Law, and the “road” with life. As Jesus commands, one should find agreement with one’s opponent. It is the Spirit and God’s forgiveness that brings this accord. See *s.* 251.7.

⁵⁷¹ Augustine’s insistence on the necessity of the Spirit suggests Pelagius and his cohort in the background of Augustine’s thought. Bonner writes that Pelagians were unified in their belief that each human was endowed with free will, and did not possess any “original sin.” The movement lasted somewhere between 408 until 431 CE, when it was condemned at the Council of Ephesus—though, it continued to reemerge at various times in the centuries ahead. Augustine’s *ep.* 140 (written in 412 CE) indicates one of his primary concerns with Pelagianism: that if one were to accept it, one would tend toward pride, erroneously believing one could obtain righteousness on one’s own. This runs completely counter to Augustine’s doctrine of Original Sin and the necessity of the Holy Spirit. Augustine did not turn much attention toward Pelagianism, though, until 415 CE when he and his fellow-African theologians determined that the movement might pose a serious challenge to their theology and authority in the Church. Much of Augustine’s own battle with Pelagianism revolved around his engagement with Julian Eclanum and his work. Over the past few decades, scholars have undertaken a major reconsideration of Pelagianism. Pelagians are now seen as a group with internal diversity. Despite what the writings of Augustine and other theologians indicate, the Pelagian movement seems to have been relatively small. It was the fear on the part of Augustine and his fellow theologians that made the movement seem much more of a threat than it actually was. What seems to be clear, though, is that its proponents saw themselves as defenders of the faith, and had two primary opponents: Arianism and Manichaeism. Augustine objected to the theological approach that Pelagians took to defend Christianity from Arianism and Manichaeism. See Gerald Bonner, “Pelagianism and Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 33-51. See also Gerald Bonner, “Augustine and Pelagianism,” *Augustinian Studies* 24 (1993): 27-47.

The significance of being among the captured fish is that those who are “caught” are the elect, the ones who will be found in the kingdom. Augustine makes clear, however, that the reception of the Spirit is no guarantee of entry into the kingdom. One must practice and preach the Law as well, in order to be among the fish caught by the disciples, lest one succumb to Christ’s warning that the one who breaks one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁷² According to Augustine, Christ’s warning means that this person will not enter the kingdom.⁵⁷³ Thus, by fulfilling the Decalogue with the aid of the Spirit, one will enter the kingdom and be counted among the 153.⁵⁷⁴ Though not mentioned in *Io. ev. tr.* 122, Augustine’s exegesis should also be considered alongside his doctrine of predestination, in which he states that God’s elect are those whom *God* has chosen to persevere in the faith.⁵⁷⁵ So, while human effort is essential, so too is God’s grace, which God alone dispenses.

⁵⁷² For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *f. et. op.* 11,17.

⁵⁷³ See Matt 5:19. The Matthean text, it should be noted, does not state that the one who breaks one of the least of the commandments and teaches others to do likewise will be excluded from the kingdom, but will be considered *least* in the kingdom.

⁵⁷⁴ To someone unfamiliar with Augustine, his interest in numerology may seem peculiar. Such interest was quite common during Augustine’s time, both among Christians and non-Christians, and for Augustine in particular, numerology held a prominent place in his larger interest in *sacramenta*, or hidden meanings in the biblical text. See Gerald Bonner, “Augustine as Biblical Scholar,” in *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, vol. 1 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, eds. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 559-560. Augustine’s interest, in part, may be attributed to a general Greco-Roman interest in Neopythagoreanism. However, as William Most points out, while adherents of Neopythagoreanism focused their attention on the numbers four, eight, and ten, Augustine placed high interest in the number seven, which did not have any special significance for Neopythagoreanism. In addition, Augustine focused on numbers above ten, which the Neopythagoreanism did not do. This leads Most to argue that Augustine’s interest in numbers stems from other church fathers, a broader philosophical trust in the science of numbers, and most especially, the Bible itself, which clearly has a deep interest in various numbers and the symbolism they carry. See William G. Most, “The Scriptural Basis of St. Augustine’s Arithmology,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 13:3 (July 1951): 284-295. See also *doc. Chr.* 2.25.

⁵⁷⁵ Predestination is certainly one of Augustine’s more controversial doctrines. See Paul Rigby, “The Role of God’s ‘Inscrutable Judgments’ in Augustine’s Doctrine of Predestination,” *Augustinian Studies* 33:2 (2002): 213-222. Rigby helpfully explains the inner workings of predestination in Augustine’s understanding, arguing that Augustine appeals to the concept of *Deus Absconditus* to bring together God’s justice and mercy in God’s initiative.

Finally, in addition to correct interpretation and the presence of the Spirit, observing the Decalogue also requires a certain disposition. In *s.* 9.6-8, Augustine identifies the ten strings of a harp in Ps 144:9⁵⁷⁶ with the ten commandments of the Decalogue. The psalm states, “O God, I will sing you a new song, on a harp of ten strings I will play to you.” The one who follows all ten commandments is the one whom the psalm states “sings a new song.” God gave the Jewish people the Decalogue, but only a minority observed it. This minority, however, observed the Decalogue out of fear of punishment, not out of love of justice. Those who observe out of fear hold the harp, but do not sing. They are like an old man who can only sing the old song. The harp to them is a burden. Those who hold it out of love are the ones who sing. They are like a new man who sings the new song.⁵⁷⁷ The goal of life should be to become the new man, following the Decalogue out of love of justice. This is done when you “change your ways” (*mutate mores*); that is, when you begin to love God instead of the world, and when you begin to love your neighbor instead of caring only for yourself (recall Augustine’s distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” here). In a similar vein, Augustine in *spir. et litt.* 14,24-26 states that when a person follows the Decalogue out of fear of punishment, this person becomes like a slave, and does not really observe the Decalogue at all. Only the person who has the Spirit follows the Decalogue out of love of righteousness. This person delights in the Law, and in this person, the Spirit gives life.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ The psalm is centered on the deliverance of Israel. In dealing with the psalm, Augustine seems to be concerned only with v. 9, along with a brief reference in *s.* 9.13 to v. 1 (see below). It appears Augustine’s focus on the psalm is due in large part to the fact that the congregation had sung the psalm before Augustine spoke (*s.* 9.6).

⁵⁷⁷ Augustine draws on the Eph 4:22-25 to make his comparison.

⁵⁷⁸ For parallels to Augustine’s exegesis, see *c. ep. pel.* 4,11-12; and *c. Faust.* 15, 17-19.

Nevertheless, Augustine states in *s.* 9.6-8, it is still better to carry the harp and not sing, than to not carry the harp at all. Those who do not follow the Decalogue do not even carry the harp. But those who do carry the harp and sing, Augustine states in *s.* 9.13, are like the one in Ps 144:1 who trains for battle. To play the harp (or observe the Decalogue) is to wield the weapon that slays the wild beasts (or the sins and temptations that would overcome one). The harp player, then, is both a musician and a hunter.

3.2.5 The Rewards of the Decalogue

In *s.* 8,⁵⁷⁹ Augustine attempts to draw significance from a parallel between the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt and ten commandments given to the people of God. Augustine suggests that while the ten plagues did actually occur, they must be interpreted spiritually to be fully understood.⁵⁸⁰ When this is done, it becomes clear that each plague, in successive order, describes the condition or damage caused by a trespasser of each commandment, also in successive order. So, for example, the first plague describes the damage done to a trespasser of the first commandment, the second plague describes the damage done to a trespasser of the second commandment, and so on and so forth. I will describe the connections Augustine makes between the first three plagues and first three commandments in each section below. For now, I will focus only on Augustine's general

⁵⁷⁹ *S.* 8 was written some time before 411 CE, and centers on Exod 20:2-7. All translations of *s.* 8, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/1.

⁵⁸⁰ Affirming the historicity of an event while searching for a spiritual meaning is typical of Augustine's hermeneutic. For a brief explanation, see Frederick Van Fleteren, "Principles of Augustine's Hermeneutic: An Overview," in *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, eds. Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 8-11; but cf. Roland Teske, *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 62-63. In Augustine's own words in *s.* 8.2, "Thus we must begin by laying the foundation of the solid reality of the [biblical] events, and then go on to inquire into their figurative meaning, or else if we take away the foundation it will look as if we are determined to build on air."

comments about the Decalogue and the plagues. Augustine believes the connections he has drawn between the plagues and the commandments should inspire his hearers to follow the commandments. He then states that those who follow the Decalogue will be like Israel: they will be led out of Egypt in their own exodus. (We can extrapolate from Augustine's interpretation that they are free from their slavery to sin.⁵⁸¹) Those who do not follow the Decalogue will be like Egypt: they will suffer, with the locus of the torment being their own souls.⁵⁸²

Continuing with the exodus theme in *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19-21,⁵⁸³ Augustine turns to Exod 23:22-23, paraphrasing the biblical text with "that your enemies may be driven away before you, and that you may receive the land [i.e., of Israel] which God promised to your fathers." For Augustine, this is the reward for following the Decalogue. There are two senses to this reward, the literal (or carnal) and the spiritual. The former is actual physical entrance into the Land of Israel and rescue from enemies. The latter is the greater of the two, and entails eternal life, or knowledge of God.⁵⁸⁴ The Jews could not understand the spiritual reward, and so were offered the physical reward, lest they succumb to idolatry.⁵⁸⁵ Those Christians who follow the law with the hope of the physical reward will not actually fulfill the law. They will eventually become bitter,

⁵⁸¹ Augustine goes on to interpret, in *s.* 8.16, the plundering of Egypt (Exod 12:36). He interprets the gold and silver that Israel takes as wise and eloquent people, respectively, whom the Church converts. Augustine then states that the Egyptian clothing that Israel also took was various languages, which Christians now use for the cause of Christ.

⁵⁸² For a parallel to Augustine's exegesis, see *f. et. op.* 11,17.

⁵⁸³ *Io. ev. tr.* 3 is a homily on Jn 1:15-18, delivered on Sunday, December 23, 406. All translations of *Io. ev. tr.* 3, including biblical quotes, are from WSA III/12.

⁵⁸⁴ Augustine, here, cites Jn 17:3 and Ps 26:4. See below for more on Augustine's view on the knowledge of God, and the ability of humans to obtain it.

⁵⁸⁵ Augustine goes on to state that the Jews committed idolatry, nonetheless. Not long after God rescued them from Egypt they placed their trust in Moses, instead of God, and when Moses disappeared on Mount Sinai, they turned to idolatry and constructed the golden calf. In *en. Ps.* 77.34, Augustine states that they continued to commit idolatry in the Land.

because they will find that life is such that sinful people obtain physical pleasures, while righteous people receive physical ills. To avoid bitterness, Christians should seek after God alone, and see God as the reward (again, recall Augustine's distinction between "use" and "enjoyment"). Such people will be satisfied for eternity.

3.2.1 General Interpretations of the First Three Commandments

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, Augustine discusses a wide variety of matters in relation to each commandment of the Decalogue, which can make it difficult to detect any patterns or cohesion between his interpretations. To help guide the reader through Augustine's exegesis, I will summarize briefly the general ways in which Augustine interprets each commandment.

On the whole, Augustine has a tendency to interpret the first three commandments in spiritual ways. The word "spiritual" has a specific meaning in Augustinian exegesis. It refers to "God or the soul as incorporeal." When Augustine states he is engaging in a spiritual interpretation, he means that he is "interpret[ing] the corporeal things mentioned [in a biblical text] as referring to incorporeal things."⁵⁸⁶ In Augustine's own view, only

⁵⁸⁶ Teske, *To Know God*, 62-63. Teske also states that in Augustine's understanding, only one who has received the Holy Spirit can understand the biblical texts spiritually. While some might categorize the allegorical, moral, and/or analogical senses of Scripture as the spiritual sense, Augustine himself did not see these as strictly equivalent. The carnal/material and spiritual interpretations of the biblical text are part of Augustine's semiology, in which a sign (*signum*) points to a thing (*res*)—thus, the carnal/material points to the spiritual—a basic and necessary relationship that makes revelation possible after the Fall. In its fallen state, humanity needs assistance in receiving revelation. Before the Fall, signs were not required. For a description of the development of Augustine's semiology, see John Norris, "Augustine and Sign in *Tractatus in Iohannis Euangelium*," in *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, eds. Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001), 215-231.

See also Michael Cameron, "The Christological Substructure of Augustine's Figurative Exegesis," in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 79-80. Cameron offers a helpful way of categorizing Augustine's non-literal interpretations. Augustine groups such interpretations into a broader category known as figurative interpretation (from *figura*). Under this

the Sabbath commandment should be interpreted spiritually; nevertheless, spiritual interpretations can be detected throughout Augustine's exegesis of the first two commandments, as well. This might be seen as a contradiction of what Augustine states in *spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26, that the nine non-Sabbath commandments should be understood in their literal sense. However, what seems to be happening is that in Augustine's view, his interpretations are merely following the plain sense of the first two commandments, which themselves contain spiritual elements.

Each of the first three commandments, for Augustine, relates to one member of the trinity. The first commandment centers on the Father. The primary point Augustine makes with this commandment is that it protects divine incomprehensibility. God is beyond all knowledge, all perception, all words.⁵⁸⁷ The fundamental problem with idolatry is that it attempts to depict God in limited ways, whether in physical forms or mental images. The only way that God can truly be "seen" is through the intellect—that is, through one's knowledge of God, though limited such an endeavor will ultimately be.

category are two interpretive approaches: *anagogic* and *dramatic*. The former encompasses the spiritual interpretations that Teske describes. The latter refers to interpretations that relate corporeal things mentioned in the biblical text to other corporeal things.

It is also worth noting that in *doc. Chr.* 3.14, 23 Augustine states that all Scriptural texts should be understood literally, unless the plain sense meaning violates the double commandment or the creed. In these instances, a text should be read in its spiritual sense.

⁵⁸⁷ See Frederick Van Fleteren, "Per Speculum et in aenigmate: 1 Corinthians 13:12 in the Writings of St. Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 69-102. Through a survey of Augustine's writings, Van Fleteren argues that for Augustine, human knowledge of God is only partial while on earth. This is Augustine's understanding of 1 Cor 13:12, in which Paul states *per speculum in aenigmate*, usually translated, Van Fleteren states, as "through a glass darkly" (Van Fleteren, "Per Speculum," 70). In another article, Van Fleteren argues that Augustine develops an apophatic theology. Even words are insufficient in describing God: "In the final analysis man can only be awestruck by the divine." Augustine's apophatic theology drew initially from Platonic influences, which saw matter as that which impedes the spirit from gaining knowledge. However, as time went on, he turned more heavily to biblical reasons, especially Paul's 1 Cor 13:12, Isa 11:2-3, and Augustine's understanding of Original Sin. See Van Fleteren, "Principles," 5-6.

The second commandment concerns the Son. Augustine frequently thinks of “Lord” as a synonym for the Son. In addition, Augustine thinks of the “name of God” as Christ, and Christ, in turn, as referring to the incarnation of the Son.⁵⁸⁸ The ramification is that when Augustine sees the commandment to not take the name of the “Lord your God” in vain, he naturally thinks of Christ as the referent. For Augustine, to take Christ’s name “in vain” is to speak falsehoods about Christ. Such an endeavor is *vanitas* (“futility”). The purpose of the commandment, then, is to protect the truth of Christ. In other words, the commandment is against all heresies.

The third commandment centers on the Spirit. Augustine argues that for Christians, the Sabbath must be understood and practiced in its spiritual sense. This means that when the commandment directs one to rest, this is not in reference to the body, but to sin. When one practices the Sabbath spiritually, then, one ceases from sin. In doing this, one is given a good conscience, which leads to the rest of one’s mind and soul. The only way in which one can practice the Sabbath in its spiritual sense, however, is through the work of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit, one will never truly rest.

Now having summarized Augustine’s general interpretations of each commandment, I will delve into each with more depth.

⁵⁸⁸ As a name makes something known, Christ makes God known through the incarnation. I am indebted to Edmund Hill for pointing this out. See Hill, *Sermons I (1-19)*, WSA III/1, 279, n. 4.

3.3 FIRST COMMANDMENT (EXOD 20:3-6)

3.3.1 Preliminary Comments

For Augustine, the first commandment in Exodus 20 runs from vv. 3-6.⁵⁸⁹ In various places,⁵⁹⁰ Augustine explains that the first commandment, in its basic sense, describes God as one,⁵⁹¹ commands the worship of God alone, and prohibits making idols or images in the likeness of God. In his more in-depth interpretations of the Exodus text, Augustine concentrates his commentary on individual portions of the text, focusing specifically on vv. 4-5. With v. 4, Augustine explicates his primary understanding of the first commandment: the promotion and protection of God's ineffability. With v. 5a, Augustine attempts to reconcile God's immutability with God's supposed jealousy. The discussion leads to a new articulation of divine ineffability. With vv. 5b, Augustine moves away from the first commandment and speaks more generally about God's justice, cross-generational punishment, Original Sin, and imitated sin. My analysis of Augustine's exegesis will follow the course of the Exodus text, beginning first with Augustine's commentary on Exod v. 4, and ending with his interpretations of v. 5b.

⁵⁸⁹ Augustine does not seem to consider Exod 20:2 as part of the first commandment. See Greelings, 108.

⁵⁹⁰ See *s.* 9.3, 6; 179A.3; 248.4; 250.3; *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19; *en. Ps.* 77.34; *f. et. op.* 11,17; *c. Faust.* 15.6; *cons. ev.* 1,26,41; and *c. ep. pel.* 3,10.

⁵⁹¹ Augustine cites Deut 6:4 in *s.* 9.3 and 179A.3. He apparently thought of this verse as part of the Decalogue. See Greelings, 108.

3.3.2 Prohibition on Images of God and Divine Ineffability (Exod 20:4)

In *ep.* 55.20,⁵⁹² Augustine states that humans should not worship a human-made object that has the likeness of God (*in figmentis hominum Dei similitudo*), and that this is “not because God does not have an image, but because no image of him ought to be worshiped except that Image that is what he is, and that Image ought not to be worshiped in place of him, but along with him.”⁵⁹³ In other words, God does have an “Image”: the incarnate Christ, who should be worshiped along with the Father, not in place of him.⁵⁹⁴ The purpose of the first commandment, then, is to direct proper worship of God, and to ensure that even though any perception or knowledge of God is limited on earth, one does not worship anything, except God in God’s self.⁵⁹⁵ The ability to “see” or perceive God, as Augustine states more strongly in the decade after writing *ep.* 55 (i.e., between 408-415 CE), can only be done through the intellect. No human eye can see God.⁵⁹⁶ Thus, it follows that no image can faithfully depict God. To “see” God with the intellect is not to visualize God, but to know God. If one were to visualize God, one would actually be committing a form of idolatry. Even when the Scriptures describe God with body parts,

⁵⁹² *Epistula* 55 was written around 400 CE, along with *ep.* 54. Augustine thought of them as books, not letters, calling them *Two Books of Answers to the Questions of Januarius*. Januarius was a Christian who wrote to Augustine concerning the topic of which religious practices Christians should follow. Augustine spends most of *ep.* 55 describing Easter. The sections relevant to us revolve around the relation of the Sabbath to Easter (Pasch), and the full meaning of the Sabbath. See Roland Teske, *Letters 1-99*, vol. II/1 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2001), 209, 215-216. All translations of *ep.* 55, including biblical quotes, are from WSA II/1.

⁵⁹³ The Latin reads *non quia non habet imaginem Deus, sed quia nulla imago ejus coli debet, nisi illa quae hoc est quod ipse; nec ipsa pro illo, sed cum illo*. There is an artfulness of the last couple of clauses with *illa*, *ipse*, *ipsa*, and *illo* to emphasize Augustine’s point.

⁵⁹⁴ This statement links the first commandment to the second, in which Augustine discusses proper knowledge and worship of Christ.

⁵⁹⁵ See footnote 587 for more on the ineffability of God.

⁵⁹⁶ See Van Fleteren, “Per Speculum,” 82-86.

this is not meant to be taken literally, but spiritually.⁵⁹⁷ Thus, in *qu. hept. Lev. 68*, Augustine states that there is no reason or circumstance in which idolatry could be considered righteous.⁵⁹⁸

In Augustine's comparison of the Decalogue with the ten plagues in *s. 8.4*, the first plague involves God turning the waters of the Nile into blood. Augustine compares God to the water from which all things come.⁵⁹⁹ All creatures (humans, birds, four-footed animals, and serpents) are like the blood.⁶⁰⁰ The turning of water into blood symbolizes a person who does not conceive of God in the correct way: like the bloody water, he/she

⁵⁹⁷ See *en. Ps. 74.11*. In this particular instance, Augustine is commenting on Ps 74:9 [75:8], when it states that God has a cup of wine in his hand. Augustine argues that "hand" is merely another way of saying "power."

⁵⁹⁸ This is located in a broader discussion of whether circumstances could dictate whether certain negative commandments, namely lying, could be done for righteous reasons. Augustine concludes that a lie (along with idolatry) is a sin that should never be committed, regardless of the reasons or circumstances. As Paul Griffiths points out, to understand why Augustine is categorically against lying, one must understand the relationship between lying and pride. According to Augustine, all that a human is given is not his/her own, but a gift from God. Speech is also a gift from God. Its purpose is adoration of God, praise of God's good deeds, and confession of one's need for God. A human who suffers from pride believes that all that he/she has is in fact his/her own and has no origin in God. When one lies (i.e., when one is intentionally duplicitous with one's speech), one is acting with pride: one thinks speech is one's own to do with as one wills. In this way, a lie is like an idol, curved into itself, with the liar having lost sight of God. God intended speech to be used for good purposes. A lie, however, uses speech for other purposes. In this way, a lie is evil; in it is the absence of good. Thus, under no circumstance can a lie be made. See Paul Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 31, 60, 85, 90-91, 94.

Augustine goes on to observe in *qu. hept. Lev. 68* that even though a lie is a sin, a lie can be pardoned by God if the lie was done for a righteous reason. Augustine lists Rahab and the midwives in Exodus as examples. All of them lied, which is a sin, but they were pardoned, because they lied to save lives. Augustine emphasizes, however, that all of them *still* committed a sin. He then warns that committing a sin (e.g., lying or idolatry) to save a life can lead to a whole host of (unintended) negative consequences. For Augustine, sinning to save a life is based on a flawed consequentialist argument. This argument holds that a harm can be committed if it prevents a greater harm. Augustine breaks down harms into two categories: sinful (e.g., idolatry) and nonsinful (bodily pain). Augustine rejects the former, arguing that all sins are the result of pride; therefore, no sin is truly greater than any other. And he rejects the latter, arguing that what matters most is not the preservation of physical life but entrance into eternal life; thus, sinning to preserve physical life misses humanity's goal entirely. Augustine adds that consequentialist arguments require one to judge which harm is greater. Since humans are prone to choose earthly desires over eternal desires, one's judgment will inevitably become flawed. See Griffiths, 94-97.

⁵⁹⁹ Augustine cites 1 Cor 8:6.

⁶⁰⁰ The description of humans, birds, four-footed animals, and serpents comes from Rom 1:21-23, which Augustine is reading in conjunction with the first commandment. This exegetical move perhaps unintentionally limits the scope of the commandment, as Exod 20:4 is much more expansive, describing not only anything in heaven or on the earth, but beneath, as well.

possesses a clouded mind. Such a person thinks of the incorruptible Father in lowly creaturely terms, as corruptible images of humans, birds, four-footed animals, or serpents.⁶⁰¹ This person thinks of himself/herself as wise, but he/she is actually a fool. Augustine makes clear that it is not God who changes into blood, but one's mind. One could suppose Augustine is refuting the incarnation, intentionally or not. But, in *s.* 8.18, Augustine's recapitulation of his spiritual interpretation of the plagues makes absolutely clear that the first plague and first commandment should be related to the Father, and the second plague and commandment to the Son.⁶⁰² Indeed, to think of God as mutable would be to violate the commandment that Augustine is describing. The first commandment, in this spiritual interpretation, then, has to do with the state of one's mind, whether one knows and relates to the Father properly, or succumbs to clouded thoughts.

What Augustine has done with all of these interpretations of the first commandment is to show that the prohibition on images includes not only physical objects, but mental images, as well. Augustine places special emphasis on the latter, and does so for two reasons: (1) since the primary aim in one's life is to know God with the intellect, it is essential one know God in the correct way; and (2) since the mind is the very place where the making of physical objects is first conceived,⁶⁰³ it is best to address the problem of idolatry at its root.

⁶⁰¹ Augustine turns to Rom 1:21-23 to assist with his interpretation.

⁶⁰² See Hill, *Sermons 1-19*, WSA III/1, 257, n. 70.

⁶⁰³ Throughout this interpretation, one can detect a critique of Manichean metaphysics, or materialist philosophy in general, whether direct or indirect. Manicheans conceived of the spiritual as somehow corporeal, like the Stoics, and thus resorted to mental images of God. This made them susceptible to the criticism that their theology left God mutable and less than omnipotent. See Teske, *To Know God*, 139-143; Roland Teske, "General Introduction," in *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, New City Press, 2006),

3.3.3 The Jealousy of God: Divine Immutability and Ineffability (Exod 20:5a)

In *trin.* 1.2,⁶⁰⁴ Augustine states that some make the mistake of attributing to God aspects of the human body or created spirit/soul; others make the mistake of thinking they have obtained an understanding of the immutable God that they believe they have the whole truth, and thus reject any correction. Meanwhile, others think of God as bright white or red, or forgetful, or self-begetting. Scripture was written to help people not succumb to any of these pitfalls. Considering our naïveté and ignorance, the Bible uses language as stepping stones to help us know God. For example, the Bible will state that God has wings (Ps 17:8) or that God is jealous (Exod 20:5) or that God feels regret (Gen 6:7). God does not actually have wings, or feel jealousy or regret. Rather, Scripture uses corporeal terms as aids to help us know who God actually is. Augustine writes, “The divine Scriptures then are in the habit of making something like children’s toys out of things that occur in creation, by which to entice our sickly gaze and get us step by step to seek as best we can the things that are above and forsake the things that are below.”⁶⁰⁵ In

11; and Roland Teske, “Augustine, the Manichees and the Bible,” in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. and trans. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 209, 215.

⁶⁰⁴ *De trinitate* was written over the course of two decades, between 400-420 CE. As the title suggests, the work centers on an exposition of the trinity, beginning first with the mission of each divine persona, and from there, moving onto the processions. Interestingly, the work, as a whole, does not appear to have been written for any specific occasion, nor against any specific theology or theologian; though, the work does become polemical at times, arguing especially against the Arians. Overall, *trin.* seems to have been written as a result of Augustine’s own fascination with the topic. The work can roughly be divided into two sections, with the first centering on the Trinity itself, and the second on the trinitarian image of God found in humanity. The section that concerns us comes from Book I, which contains Augustine’s introductory remarks, followed by an argument, based on his reading of the New Testament, that the Son and Holy Spirit share equality with the Father. One theological point that Augustine continually repeats is that God is unchanging. See Edmund Hill, “Introduction,” in *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, vol. I/5 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 18-59. All translations of *trin.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/5.

⁶⁰⁵ Hill, *The Trinity*, WSA I/5, 66.

c. *Adim.* 7,4,⁶⁰⁶ Augustine elaborates on this notion that all words, even the words of Scripture, are inadequate in describing God. These words are only meant to point people to the truth. When Exod 20:5 states that God is jealous, that jealousy is the kind that a husband has in guarding his wife's chastity. What the text is really trying to communicate is that God will not leave sin unpunished, and that the concept of jealousy can facilitate, though imperfectly, one's knowledge of God in this way.⁶⁰⁷ What the text is *not* saying is that God could ever become jealous. Jealousy, for Augustine, is incompatible with God's

⁶⁰⁶ *Contra Adimantum, Manichaei discipulum* was written around 394 CE. In general, Manicheism conceived of creation as divided into two natures, one good and one evil. The good exists in the kingdom of light, otherwise known as "The Father of Greatness," or first God, under whom are around forty gods and goddesses (though, there is debate about the extent to which these gods and goddesses are independent). Manicheism adopted a materialist philosophy, which was dominant in the West, that all things that exist have a body. Consequently, God is understood not as spiritual, but as bodily. For many Manicheans, that meant picturing God as a luminous mass. The evil exists in the kingdom of darkness, otherwise known as Satan. At the beginning, the two were separated from each other. During our era, the middle times, the two are intermixed, with the good nature spread throughout the world as particles that are trapped in the evil nature. Each human's inner conflict between good and evil is a product of the greater struggle between the two natures. The good nature in a human is the soul, which is from God, and actually a part of God. The evil nature is the physical body. At the end times, the two natures will be divided once more. Those who follow Manichean teachings and ascetical practices (which includes releasing light from bright food by eating it) will help separate the good from the evil, in a struggle that will eventually banish the evil kingdom, and free most, but not all, of the good particles from their imprisonment in evil. Some good will be trapped in darkness forever.

Manicheans did not accept the Old Testament. This includes the Law (save for the nine non-Sabbath commandments of the Decalogue, which they observed), and the God of the Old Testament, both of which they found to be barbaric. In addition, they only found authoritative the sections of the New Testament that supported Manichean beliefs. The incompatibility of the Old and New Testaments is the primary focus of Adimantus' work, which Augustine came into possession of eight years or so after he left the Manichean tradition and converted to Christianity. Adimantus himself was apparently one of the twelve disciples of Mani, the founder of Manicheism, and thus was considered one of the most important figures in the religion. Adimantus' method was to underscore passages in the New Testament that contradicted the Old. In his answer to Adimantus, Augustine attempts to show that the Old and New Testament passages Adimantus believes are contradictory are actually not. (Augustine refers to the method of solving apparent contradictions between the Old and New Testament in *util. cred.* 3.5-6 as "analogical interpretation.") Augustine's work follows the course of the Old Testament, applying an analogical interpretation to each biblical verse that Adimantus identifies. See Teske, *Manichean Debate*, WSA I/19, 9-13; Roland Teske, "Introduction," in *The Manichean Debate*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, New City Press, 2006), 165-173; Teske, "Augustine, the Manichees," 208-221. All translations of c. *Adim.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/19.

⁶⁰⁷ On this point, Augustine seems to agree, at least to an extent, with the Manicheans. He anticipates that the Manicheans would be bothered by Exod 20:5 describing God as jealous. Augustine himself is bothered by this idea, too. It would be interesting to know whether Adimantus would be satisfied with Augustine's explanation.

immutability, as one of the central aspects of immutability is the inability of anything to affect God.⁶⁰⁸

As a final note in Augustine's argument with Adimantus in *c. Adim.* 11, Augustine writes that the Manicheans speak "slanderosly" against Exod 20:5,⁶⁰⁹ when the text states, "You shall not worship strange gods." The Manicheans, Augustine states, believe in the existence of many gods, and worship some of them (see footnote 606). Thus, they are "displeased" with Exod 20:5 and its prohibition on worshipping "strange gods." According to Adimantus, Exod 20:5 contradicts Jn 17:25, when it states, "Just Father, the world has *also* not known you" (emphasis mine). In Adimantus' mind, Exod 20:5's prohibition on worshipping "strange gods" is absurd, because not only does the Gospel of John specifically state "the world has not known" the Father, but it states "also," which implies the existence of other gods.

In addition, Adimantus argues that the God of the Old Testament is clearly unjust, because this God is consumed with petty jealousy. This jealousy prevents God from allowing people to worship other gods.⁶¹⁰ Augustine counters this by arguing that "the whole hope of our salvation is the jealousy of God." Similar to his argument in *c. Adim.* 7,4, Augustine states that God is jealous, not because God is petty, but because God wants nothing more than to ensure God's people remain faithful. Besides, God is not actually jealous. The Holy Spirit uses words like "jealousy," which are obviously

⁶⁰⁸ See Teske, *To Know God*, 131-151. The development of Augustine's theology of divine immutability derived from his growing opposition to Manicheanism. Neoplatonism also played a role. For Augustine, immutability means that something does not and cannot change—on its own or by anything else. This includes one's substance, one's knowledge, one's will, and one's emotions. Things that are mutable are temporal. Things that are immutable have no past or future, but simply are.

⁶⁰⁹ For a parallel to Augustine's exegesis, see *c. Faust.* 15.6.

⁶¹⁰ Following the lead of Adimantus, Augustine refers to Exod 34:14, not Exod 20:5. The former reads, "Your God is called jealous for he is very jealous."

unworthy of describing God, to signal to the reader that even words that seem most worthy, such as mercy, are nonetheless still unworthy of describing God. The ultimate purpose of human language is to lead one to “divine silence,” a knowledge of God that is beyond words.⁶¹¹ This, as noted before, is the central theme of Augustine’s interpretation of the first commandment.

3.3.4 Cross-Generational Punishment: God and Justice (Exod 20:5b)

From this point forward, Augustine’s comments are not specific to the first commandment, and are more general in nature. In *c. Adim.* 7,1-2, Augustine takes up a possible contradiction between the Gospel of Matthew and Exod 20:5. Augustine states that according to Adimantus the Manichean, Exod 20:5 is contradicted by Matt 5:45 and 18:22. According to Exodus, God punishes children for the sins of the parents: “I am a jealous God, punishing children to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents who hated me.” But according to Matthew, God not only treats good and bad people the same, but also commands the forgiveness of sins: “Be good like your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise over the good and the bad” (Matt 5:45), and “You must forgive your brother who sins not merely seven times but even seventy times seven times” (Matt 18:22). Behind Adimantus’ argument seems to be a critique of the “God of the Old Testament”: this God is so wildly unjust that he punishes children for the sins of their parents.

⁶¹¹ See footnote 587.

Augustine refutes this apparent contradiction with the Manicheans' own doctrine. The Manicheans, Augustine argues, state that "God is preparing an eternal prison for the nation of darkness, which they say is the enemy of God." This is a reference to Manichean eschatology, in which the evil nature will be banished for eternity (see footnote 606). Augustine then adds, "And that is not enough: they [the Manicheans] do not hesitate to say that he will also punish his own members along with that nation." Augustine seems to be referring to the Manichean belief that some good particles will be unavoidably trapped with the kingdom of darkness forever. In effect, Adimantus' own Manichean doctrine not only contradicts the two verses of Matthew that Adimantus tries to level against Augustine, but this doctrine presents a picture that is far bleaker than what the Old Testament depicts: indeed, the Old Testament states that for generations God punishes children for their parents' sins, but Manichean doctrine goes much further in stating that for eternity God will banish some of the good with the bad. Augustine then argues that when Exod 20:5 states "punishing children to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents who hated me," the phrase "who hated me" is referring to the children.⁶¹² By doing this, Augustine is able to argue that Exod 20:5 means that God only punishes children for the sins of their parents if the children commit the same sin.⁶¹³ Augustine follows this by arguing that God's punishment does not come from a place of cruelty, but a place of justice.⁶¹⁴ Augustine then shows that both testaments agree that it

⁶¹² This is not the most natural reading of the Exodus text. The phrase "who hated me" most naturally refers to the parents.

⁶¹³ A similar position to the one Augustine will articulate in *qu. hept. Dt. 42* a few decades later; see below.

⁶¹⁴ Augustine cites Wis 1:5 as proof. He notes that the text indicates that the Holy Spirit departs from a person before he/she sins.

is not God who is cruel, but the one who sins, and in committing sin, one is being cruel to oneself.⁶¹⁵

Finally, when Exod 20:5 states third and fourth generation, Augustine takes this to mean the four ages that Matthew speaks of: (1) from Abraham to David; (2) David to Babylon; (3) Babylon to the birth of Christ. The fourth generation runs from Christ's coming to the end of the age.⁶¹⁶ Augustine states that by "generation," Exod 20:5 means "age." From this, Augustine argues that the full meaning of "punishing children to the third and fourth generation" is that cross-generational punishment will continue into the third generation (from Babylon to the birth of Christ), and even into the fourth (from Christ to the end of the age). However, children will not be punished for their parents' sin if children do not imitate their parents' sin.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ Augustine cites Wis 2:21; Prov 5:22; and Rom 1:24.

⁶¹⁶ See Matt 1:17; 13:39-49.

⁶¹⁷ Augustine cites Ezek 18:14-20 as proof. What is particularly odd about Augustine's interpretation is that Augustine states that the first age begins with Abraham. Does this mean that cross-generational punishment does not exist before Abraham? Augustine does not address this point.

Augustine focuses on the meaning of Matt 5:25 ("Be good like your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise over the good and the bad") and Matt 18:22 ("forgive your brother who sins not merely seven times but even seventy times seven times") in *c. Adim* 7,3 and 7,5, respectively. The meaning of Matt 5:25 is that God blesses bad people so that they will be stirred to repent. This shows God's patience. Nonetheless, God will still punish those who have sinned. Augustine cites Rom 2:4-5 and Wis 11:27 as proof. Both of these aspects, God's patience and punishment, show that in both Testaments, God is both merciful and just. As for Matt 18:22, Augustine states that Scripture means that one should forgive one's brother only if the brother repents. This is the same with God. God forgives if one repents, but God punishes if one does not. This is also the meaning of Exod 20:5—here, also, God is only speaking of those who do not repent.

3.3.5 Cross-Generational Sin and Punishment: Original Sin and Imitated Sin (Exod 20:5b)

Augustine takes up a possible contradiction with Exod 20:5 again, a few decades later, in *qu. hept. Dt. 42*.⁶¹⁸ Here, Augustine considers the possible contradiction between Deut 24:16, which states, “Fathers shall not die for their sons, and sons shall not die for their fathers. Each one shall die in his own sin,” and Exod 20:5, which states, “God visiting the sins of the fathers on their sons to the third and fourth generation.” The former indicates that only those who commit sins are guilty of those sins, while the latter promotes cross-generational punishments. Augustine’s solution is that the latter is referring to Original Sin, while the former is referring to sins committed after birth. In other words, Exod 20:5 states that everyone inherits Adam’s Original Sin,⁶¹⁹ while Deut 24:16 states that anyone who commits a sin after birth is solely responsible for that sin. Augustine returns repeatedly to Exod 20:5 throughout *c. Iul. imp.*⁶²⁰ as proof that all

⁶¹⁸ For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *ench. 13,46*.

⁶¹⁹ For an extended study of Augustine’s understanding of Original Sin, particularly his late view, see Jesse Couenhoven, “St. Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin,” *Augustinian Studies* 36:2 (2005): 359-396. Couenhoven makes the argument that Augustine himself did not have an entirely cohesive doctrine of Original Sin. Nevertheless, one can detect five general aspects of the doctrine. The first four are primal sin (i.e., Adam’s sin in the garden); solidarity with Adam (a social and ontological connection between all of humanity and Adam, in which all humans are contained in Adam); penalty of sin (weakened human nature); and transmission of original sin (a passing on of Original Sin, not through imitation, but transmission). The fifth is the most central to the doctrine of Original Sin: inheritance—all of humanity inherits not only the guilt of Adam for rebelling against God, but also disordered ignorance (namely, lack of belief in God and lack of knowledge of God’s law) and disordered desire (we want what we cannot have; that is, we desire to sin).

⁶²⁰ *Opus imperfectum contra Iulianum* was a response to Julian of Eclanum’s work to Florus, *ad Florum* (written around 423-426), which in turn was a response to Augustine’s *nupt. Et. conc.* (written c. 421). Augustine began *c. Iul. imp.* sometime after 427, and continued to work on it until his death in 430. Augustine structured his work around Julian’s. He broke up *ad Florum* into sections, and placed them in order, quoting a section and then providing his reply, before moving onto the next section. The section of Julian’s work most relevant to us contains a sustained argument by Julian against Original Sin. Prominent in Julian’s argument is an exegesis of Deut 24:14-18 and Ezek 18:1-30, both of which he believes prove that God does not punish children for the sins of their parents; thus, Original Sin runs against Scripture. See Roland Teske, “General Introduction,” in *Answer to the Pelagians, III: Unfinished Work in Answer to*

humans inherit Original Sin from their parents via Original Sin's transmission in the seed during sexual intercourse (as opposed to through imitation),⁶²¹ adding in various places that this does not make God unjust⁶²² or dishonest⁶²³; that God alone deals out punishment for this inherited sin, not humans⁶²⁴; that sometimes God enacts punishment through humans⁶²⁵; and that this inheritance does not imply that parents can be punished for their children's sins.⁶²⁶

As for the phrase "to the third and fourth generation," Augustine notes in *qu. hept. Dt. 42* that one might take this phrase to mean Original Sin is imputed on the third and fourth generations, thereby skipping the first and second, along with all others—a very literal reading. Augustine's response to this takes a numerological route: he points out that three and four equal seven, and then argues that the number seven symbolizes all of

Julian, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/25 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1999), 13-52. All translations of *c. Iul. imp.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/25.

⁶²¹ *C. Iul. imp.* 1.50, 3.39, 3.42, 3.50, 3.54, 3.61, 3.64, 3.83, 3.84. The *c. Iul. imp.* texts from chapter three center around a debate between Augustine and Julian on whether humans inherit Original Sin from their parents, or whether they learn to sin from the imitation of others. For a summary of the major points in Julian and Augustine's debate in *c. Iul.* and *c. Iul. imp.* on Original Sin, see Carol Scheppard, "The Transmission of Sin in the Seed: A Debate between Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Eclanum," *Augustinian Studies* 27:2 (1996): 99-106.

⁶²² *C. Iul. imp.* 30.55. See Alister McGrath, "Divine Justice and Divine Equity in the Controversy of Augustine and Julian of Eclanum," *The Downside Review* 101, no. 345 (1983): 312-319. McGrath argues that Augustine and Julian both agreed that God is just. Where they diverged was the definition of justice. Julian held to Cicero's definition, which concentrated solely on individuals and their actions. Augustine did as well, until 396, when he began having difficulty reconciling this form of justice with what he saw in the Bible (e.g., the seemingly unfair way in which God dealt with Esau). From then on, Augustine developed a new definition of justice, in which individuals cannot be separated from the corporate body of humanity. Since all are in Adam, when Adam sins, all of humanity does as well.

⁶²³ *C. Iul. imp.* 30.78. Throughout the first half of chapter three, Julian argues that according to Augustine, God is dishonest, because God states that humans will not be punished for their parents' sins, but at the same time, God states that humans will be punished for their parents' sins. Augustine argues that the former relates to those who have been redeemed, and the latter to those who have not.

⁶²⁴ *C. Iul. imp.* 3.15, 3.18, 3.35, 3.37. Augustine states that the first person singular of Exod 20:5 makes clear that God alone should punish people for Original Sin.

⁶²⁵ *C. Iul. imp.* 3.30. Augustine points to Josh 6:21; 7:24-25; and 10:40.

⁶²⁶ *C. Iul. imp.* 3.20.

time. Thus, what Exod 20:5 is actually trying to communicate is that all generations throughout time inherit Original Sin.⁶²⁷

The last phrase of Exod 20:5—“these who hate me”—is taken up in *en. Ps.* 108.15.⁶²⁸ Here, Exod 20:5 has an entirely different meaning. Rather than being a text about Original Sin, it becomes a text about imitated sin. Augustine understands “I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children” to mean that children who imitate their parents, or anyone, for that matter, in hating God will incur retribution, not only for their own sin but also for the sins of those whom they imitated.⁶²⁹ Augustine then provides an example. Judas was adopted into God’s family when he became one of Jesus’ disciples. But despite this, he chose to imitate his parents in hating God, which ultimately led to his betrayal of Jesus. As a result, God remembered his parents’ sins and punished Judas for both his own sin and his parents’. Augustine makes clear also that those who convert to Christianity and choose not to imitate their parents will be free of any retribution, including that of their parents. In a sense, these people are no longer the child of their parents, but are now part of the family of God. Moreover, when they imitate good people, they will be forgiven the past sins they committed. Thus, had Judas ceased to imitate his

⁶²⁷ Augustine cites Am 1:3 to reinforce his point. The prophet states, “for three sins and for four I will not turn away.” By this, the prophet does not mean three or four sins, but all sins. Augustine seems to believe that if the number seven was written, the reader might be misled to think that only the seventh generation will receive Original Sin or not all generations are included. Putting three and four down makes no mistake that all generations are included, because three and four show the perfection of the number seven. According to Augustine, three is the first odd integer and four is the first even. Together, these indicate the perfection of the number seven.

⁶²⁸ The phrase is also addressed in *qu. hept.* Dt. 42, but is not explicated as thoroughly as it is in *en. Ps.* 108.15.

⁶²⁹ Translation of biblical citation from St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 99-120*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2003).

parents, he would have been free of the sins he had committed, and that of his parents, as well.⁶³⁰

To sum up, Augustine interprets Exod 20:5 in two different ways. In *qu. hept. Dt.* 42, the text “God visiting the sins of the fathers on their sons” refers to Original Sin. In *c. Adim.* 7,1-2 and *en. Ps.* 108.15, the same text with “to these who hate me” added refers to imitated sin.⁶³¹ Augustine clearly did not reference Original Sin in *c. Adim.* 7,1-2, since it was written before he developed the doctrine of Original Sin (he develops it around 412). It may also be possible that *en. Ps.* 108 was written before he derived the doctrine; hence, the reason why he does not mention it there, either. However, the precise dating of *en. Ps.* 108 is uncertain. It is also possible that Augustine held a doctrine of Original Sin when he wrote *en. Ps.* 108, but simply chose to use Exod 20:5 to make an argument concerning imitated sin. Whatever the case might be, a few years after *qu. hept.*, Augustine returns to Exod 20:5 in *ench.* 13,46-47, interpreting it this time to mean *both* Original Sin and imitated sin.⁶³² Here, Augustine states that a child is liable for both

⁶³⁰ Augustine cites Ezek 18:4 as proof. For parallels to Augustine’s exegesis, see *c. Iul.* 6,25,82; *c. Iul. imp.* 30.39, 30.42, 30.50, 30.54, 30.84, and 6.21.

⁶³¹ What seems to help make these two different interpretations exegetically possible for Augustine is that he is dealing with two Latin words for “visiting/punishing” in his *Vetus Latina*. In his *en. Ps.*, *qu. hept.*, and *c. Iul. imp.* texts, the word for “visiting/punishing” is *reddam* (or a variant of it). The word *reddam* (from *reddo*) can mean both “to deliver/assign” or “to punish.” Thus, Exod 20:5 could be read to mean that God is punishing the parents’ sin (*peccata*) to the third and fourth generation or assigning the parents’ (original) sin to the third and fourth generation.

In *c. Adim.* 7,1, the Latin reads *Ego sum Deus zelans, tribuens filiis tertiae et quartae generationis parentum peccata qui me oderunt*. The word *tribuens* can mean “to impute.” Thus, Augustine is able to take Exod 20:5 to mean, though in a somewhat forced way, that God will impute (i.e., punish) children who imitate their parents in hating God. It should be noted, though, that later in *c. Adim.* 7,2, Augustine uses *redditurum* (from *reddo*) in reference to God assigning to the children the punishment of the parents’ sin. It may be that when Augustine quotes Exod 20:5 in *c. Adim.* 7,1, he is quoting Adimantus’ Latin text, but if so, he does not say that explicitly.

⁶³² The *enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide spe et caritate* was likely written toward the end of Augustine’s life, c. 421 CE, making it one of Augustine’s more mature writings. He wrote it for a friend named Laurence, who asked for an *enchiridion* (“short handbook”) that outlined Augustine’s theology. Augustine states that his goal in this work is to discuss what wisdom looks like, and to show that wisdom is actually the worship of God, and that the worship of God is conducted through faith, hope, and charity. Augustine structures his book in this way, beginning with faith, and then moving on to hope, and then

Original Sin and the sins of his/her own parents, until he/she enters the new covenant through baptism.⁶³³ Augustine clarifies that only Original Sin alters human nature; the parents' sin does not. Augustine then wonders whether a child is also guilty of the sins of his/her ancestors all the way to seven prior generations. The language of Exod 20:5—to the third and fourth generations—would seem to indicate this. But without further biblical evidence, Augustine does not want to fully commit to this idea.⁶³⁴

Augustine states again six years after *ench.* in *c. Iul. imp.* 3.62, 6.18, and 6.21 that children will be punished for the sins of their parents.⁶³⁵ In *c. Iul. imp.* 3.19, he adds that “some sins of certain parents are passed on to their children, not by imitation, but by generation, and are punished in them.”⁶³⁶ Apparently, Adam's sin is not the only instance in which a sin is transmitted by generation; though, under what circumstances Augustine does not specify. However, Augustine does state in *c. Iul. imp.* 3.65 and 6.21 that the punishment children experience for the sins of their parents will be different in kind and less in degree.⁶³⁷ Alternatively, it is also possible that Augustine is making a minimal reference to Adam and Eve's sin in *c. Iul. imp.* 3.19, instead of imitated sin.

charity. Ultimately, he writes a work that almost completely summarizes his theology as it stood in 421. The work itself is not explicitly polemical, but weighing especially on Augustine's mind, which can be found throughout the *ench.*, is the Pelagian controversy. The part of the work that our section can be found in centers on the theme of faith in Christ who redeems humanity. See Michael Fiedrowicz, “Introduction,” in *On Christian Belief*, trans. Matthew O'Connell, vol. 1/8 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2005), 265-272. All translations of *ench.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA 1/8.

⁶³³ Augustine then cites Exod 20:5 and Ezek 18:2 as proof.

⁶³⁴ Augustine can find further biblical evidence for the other point in Exod 34:7; Lev 26:39; Num 14:18; and Jer 32:18. See *c. Iul. imp.* 3.20-21.

⁶³⁵ For a parallel to Augustine's exegesis, see *c. Iul.* 6,25,82.

⁶³⁶ The Latin reads *sed tamen aliquo modo nonnulla quorumque partum peccata redduntur in filios, non imitatione, sed generatione punita.*

⁶³⁷ Augustine cites Wis 11:21.

3.4 SECOND COMMANDMENT (EXOD 20:7)

3.4.1 Preliminary Remarks

In several places, Augustine merely lists the second commandment.⁶³⁸ As noted above, Augustine frequently thinks of “Lord” as a synonym for the Son. Thus, when Augustine reads the second commandment, taking the Lord’s name in vain, for him, means to speak falsehoods about Christ (i.e., promote heresies). In the analysis that follows, I will first examine Augustine’s explication of Exod 20:7, how exactly he interprets it as a commandment against heresies. I will then examine two instances of heretical views that Augustine refutes in reference to the second commandment: denial of the incarnation, and denial of Christ as “not made.”

3.4.2 Denial of the Truth

Augustine’s most extensive commentary on the second commandment appears in *s.* 8.5,⁶³⁹ his comparison between the plagues and the Decalogue. In this sermon, Augustine identifies Christ with Truth.⁶⁴⁰ Truth purifies. The one who speaks truth speaks “reasonably” and more seriously, speaks from that which is God, Truth itself, which is the Word of God. Such a person speaks “wisdom among the perfect”⁶⁴¹ and the imperfect alike. To speak the truth does not mean one knows everything about God. There are some

⁶³⁸ *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19; *s.* 248.4, 179A.3, and 250.3; and *c. ep. pel.* 3,10.

⁶³⁹ The interpretation is recapitulated briefly in *s.* 8.18.

⁶⁴⁰ Augustine cites Jn 14:6 as proof.

⁶⁴¹ Augustine is quoting 1 Cor 2:2.

aspects one may not know, such as what it fully means for Christ to be God and the one through whom everything was made.⁶⁴² But such a person still knows the essential aspects of christology,⁶⁴³ that Christ was “born of God,” the “One from One, only-begotten and co-eternal,” who was truly incarnated, taking the “form of a servant,” “born of the virgin Mary,” suffered on the cross, died, rose again, ascended into heaven, and still bears the scars. Whether one is able to grasp the more complex depths of this christology or not, one still has the truth. For those who only know the basics, the basics are like milk to an infant; for those who are able to know more, these basics become like bread for grownups. Either way, whether milk or bread, it is still truth. After all, like bread, the truth that is consumed can become milk to nourish infants. The opposite of truth is “futility” (*vanitas*).⁶⁴⁴ Futility defiles. The one who speaks futility does not actually speak, but only makes noise. Such a person declares that Christ merely pretended to undergo death, with “phantom wounds” and “fake blood,” showing “unreal scars” and “unreal wounds” to his disciples afterward.⁶⁴⁵ From this, Augustine states that to follow

⁶⁴² Augustine is quoting Jn 1:3.

⁶⁴³ The implication would be that there is a bare minimum of what one must know about Christ in order to remain in the truth. Augustine, here, is quoting 1 Cor 2:2, in which Paul states “Christ Jesus, and him crucified.” In 1 Cor 2:1, Paul states that he did not come to the Corinthians with great wisdom or speech, but merely gave the testimony of God, which is “Christ Jesus, and him crucified.” Augustine seems to believe that, as Paul states, one need not grasp great theological depth and complexity in order to have faith in God, but merely the fact of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. This is outlined in the creed, which Augustine quotes.

⁶⁴⁴ As Hill observes, the word *vanitas* is most likely drawn from Rom 1:21. See Hill, *Sermons I (1-19)*, WSA III/1, 255, n. 16.

⁶⁴⁵ According to Hill, Augustine appears to be talking about Docetism, one of the earliest movements declared heretical at the Council of Nicaea. One of Docetism’s major tenets was that Jesus only appeared to be human. Thus, while on the cross, he only looked as though he was wounded and suffering. For Hill, this is quite surprising, as Docetism was no longer a live issue in the fifth century. See Hill, *Sermons I (1-19)*, WSA III/1, 255, n. 19. Hill does theorize briefly that the Manicheans may have adopted the Docetic view, and that Augustine may have had Manicheanism in mind. Indeed, Manicheanism includes the rejection of the incarnation, which would render a bodily crucifixion of Christ impossible. Some Docetists held this view, as well. See Anne-Marie La Bonnardière, “The Bible and Polemics,” in *Augustine and the Bible*, ed. and trans. Pamela Bright (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 201. Bonnardière argues that in Augustine’s mind, as expressed in s. 183, every heresy rejected the incarnation. It was the nature of a heresy to do this.

the second commandment is to love what is true. To break the second commandment is to love futility.

The second commandment is appropriately paired with the second plague, the swarm of frogs. Frogs croak continuously and incessantly. To speak of Christ's death as a mere appearance is to croak like a frog in a marsh of mud. Such a person makes noise, but does not speak wisdom. Such a person deceives him/herself and then goes and deceives others. Unlike the truth, croaking does not nourish anyone, and it bores the ones who have the truth.⁶⁴⁶ Augustine then ends by saying that the person who speaks truth is referred to in Ps 19:3 when it states, "There are no utterances nor words whose voices are not heard." What Augustine means is that the onus is on the person who knows the truth to speak the truth; otherwise, no one will hear it. If we return to Augustine's spiritual interpretation of the harp in s. 9.13, Augustine states that touching the second string of the harp is refraining from taking God's name in vain. When one does this, one slays the "beast of impious heresies."⁶⁴⁷ In contrast, concerning the one who speaks futility, Ps 19:4 states, "their sound has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." In other words, it is much easier to spread futility than truth.⁶⁴⁸

⁶⁴⁶ The image of frogs and the association between heresy and croaking may seem bizarre to a modern person. It is important to keep in mind that Augustine's comments are part of a sermon. To generate interest from his audience, Augustine makes use of evocative imagery and perhaps even humor.

⁶⁴⁷ Hill theorizes that Augustine is referring to Arianism (which argued that Jesus Christ was not truly God, but was created at some point in time), and might also be referring to Apollinarianism (which denied that Christ had a human soul or human mind). While this may be true, the pluralization of "heresies" is likely meant to include any false belief of the Son and the incarnation, whether during Augustine's day or not.

⁶⁴⁸ Augustine only quotes Ps 12:2, which states, "Everyone has spoken futile things to his neighbor." The context of the quote suggests that he has in mind the rest of the psalm, which states that those who speak futility should be warned: God will suppress them, cutting their lips and tongues.

3.4.3 Denial of the Incarnation

In *c. Faust.* 15.7,⁶⁴⁹ Augustine argues that Manicheans break the second commandment by asserting that Christ was not born into a human body. Had Christ become incarnate, the Manicheans argue, he would have been defiled by an evil human body, as all bodies come from the kingdom of darkness. Manicheans, Augustine states in *c. Faust* 20.11, believe that rather than being born into a human body, Jesus “hangs” from every tree in the fruit that trees produce, waiting to be released by someone who eats the fruit.⁶⁵⁰ Augustine responds that it was necessary for Christ to become incarnate “in order to purify fleshly people from the vanity of the flesh.”⁶⁵¹ In addition, though Jesus was born in a human body, that body could not defile him, because by his very nature as Son of God, he could never be defiled.⁶⁵² In *c. Faust* 20.11, Augustine states that Manicheans

⁶⁴⁹ *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* was written between 408-410 CE. The work was intended as a response to Faustus’ *capitula*, which was written between 386-390 CE while Faustus was in exile. Faustus wrote his work in response to the criticisms of an unidentified Christian who had left the Manichean tradition. Some speculate this Christian was Augustine, who was a member of the tradition, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, for nine years. Faustus converted to Manicheanism and rose to the level of a bishop. His fame led Augustine to believe he would learn a great deal from Faustus, but upon meeting the bishop in Carthage, Augustine found his knowledge lacking, which significantly contributed to Augustine eventually embracing Christianity. Augustine responds to a range of issues that Faustus discusses in *capitula*. For our purposes, Augustine addresses the Manichean rejection of the Old Testament in general, and the law in particular, believing both to be in direct opposition to the New Testament and irrelevant for Christianity. In addition, Augustine also addresses the Manichean belief that Jesus was neither born, nor incarnate. As noted above, the human body, in Manichean belief, was part of the evil nature. See Roland Teske, “Introduction,” in *Answer to Faustus, a Manichean*, trans. Roland Teske, vol. I/20 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2007), 9-63. All translations of *c. Faust.*, including biblical quotes, are from WSA I/20.

⁶⁵⁰ There seems to be a connection here with the Manichean belief that they can release light from bright food by eating it (see footnote 606).

⁶⁵¹ In response to the Manicheans, Augustine argues that the incarnation was the climax of revelation. In the incarnation, God’s love is made visible; God provides an antidote to pride with humility (i.e., through the divine becoming human); and humanity is called to repent; and through the incarnation, humanity can become adopted as God’s children. See Joseph Lam Cong Quy, “Revelation, Christology and Grace in Augustine’s Anti-Manichean and Anti-Pelagian Controversies,” *Phronema* 28:2 (2013): 133-144.

⁶⁵² Augustine argues also that Manicheans overlook the fact that trees produce fruit thanks to manure, and that consumed fruit leaves the body as excrement. How could manure and excrement be purer than the body of a virgin woman?

admit that Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, but that Christ did so without a body.

Augustine counters this by arguing that Christ could not suffer without a body. One needs the latter in order to endure the former.

3.4.4 Denial of Christ as “Not Made”

In *ep.* 55.20, Augustine states that the purpose of the second commandment is to prevent people from thinking Christ is a creature. Given that all creatures are mutable, and the nature of a whole is revealed in a part,⁶⁵³ if one were to think that Christ is a creature, one would be led to the conclusion that God is a creature and is mutable.⁶⁵⁴ To think of Christ as a creature, then, is to take the Lord’s name in vain. Augustine affirms in *s.* 9.3-4, 6, that Christ in fact “put on the creature.” He became incarnate, was born of the virgin Mary, became mortal, and suffered (so that humanity might be saved).⁶⁵⁵ But Christ is also divine, and thus equal to the Father. Those who promote the belief that Christ is only a creature and was created “despise him who is equal to the Father and one with the Father.” They reject who Christ really is: the Word of God, co-eternal and “one

⁶⁵³ This may be a reference to Tychonius’ fourth rule on the relation between species and genus. According to Tychonius, that which applies to a “part” also applies to the “whole.” See *doc. Chr.* 3.47-49.

⁶⁵⁴ On God’s immutability, see footnote 608 and 680.

⁶⁵⁵ Augustine states further in *trin.* 4.31, “If you go on to ask me how the incarnation itself was done, I say that the very Word of God was made flesh, that is, was made man, without however being turned or changed into that which he was made; that he was of course so made that you would have there not only the Word of God and the flesh of man but also the rational soul of man as well; and that this whole can be called God because it is God and man because it is man” (Hill, *The Trinity*, WSA I/5, 176). Incarnation, in Augustine’s view, is the Word of God entering into a human body and soul, without being changed into either. The result is that not just the Word alone, but the body is also God. For more on the incarnation, see Brian Daley, S.J., “Incarnation,” in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 445-447.

with the one who begot him,” and equate him with creation itself, which is “subject to vanity,”⁶⁵⁶ enslaved to corruption, and in need of a savior to rescue it.

3.5 THIRD COMMANDMENT (EXOD 20:8-11)

3.5.1 Preliminary Remarks

Augustine’s interpretation of Exod 20:8-11 examines multiple topics, which I have divided into four sections. In the first, I discuss Augustine’s primary interpretation of the Sabbath commandment. According to Augustine, the Sabbath must be understood in its spiritual sense, which is a commandment to rest, not from labor, but from sin. This leads to section two, where Augustine argues that cessation of sin can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit, and that when this is done, the result is rest in mind and spirit. Section three involves a comparison of the Sabbath with the Lord’s Day, which involves a deeper discussion of physical rest versus eternal rest. This, then, leads to section four, where Augustine reconciles divine immutability with God’s supposed rest on the seventh day.

⁶⁵⁶ Augustine is quoting Rom 8:20. The implication of Augustine’s exegesis is that if Christ were merely a creature, Christ could not also be the savior. As Paul states, all creation is enslaved and cannot free itself.

3.5.2 Sabbath as Rest from Sin

In *spir. et litt.* 15,27,⁶⁵⁷ Augustine states that grace was veiled in the Old Testament and unveiled in the New. Part of what was veiled was the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath commandment. Out of all the commandments of the Decalogue, only the sabbath was “expressed in the shadow of a symbol.” The Jews observed the shadow; that is, they practiced the commandment literally, and still do. In *spir. et litt.* 14,24, Augustine writes that in observing the Sabbath commandment literally, Jews are “wise according to the flesh.”⁶⁵⁸ He states in *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19 that the Jews observe the Sabbath in a “servile fashion,” which includes “self-indulgence,” “getting drunk,” and women “dancing on balconies.” Similarly, in *s.* 9.3, he states that the Jews use their “free time” on “their frivolities and extravagances,” such as going to the stadium to join in “faction fights.”⁶⁵⁹ This is not true observance of the Sabbath.⁶⁶⁰ In fact, it would be better for the men to farm and the women to spin wool than to engage in these idle activities.

⁶⁵⁷ For parallels to Augustine’s exegesis, see *c. ep. pel.* 3,10 and *ep.* 55.17-18.

⁶⁵⁸ For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *s.* 248.4 and 250.3.

Augustine, here, is quoting Rom 8:6. In a plain sense reading of Rom 8:1-8, Paul states that anyone who follows the ways of the flesh do not follow the ways of the spirit. Those who concentrate only on matters of the flesh are hostile toward God, will never follow God’s law, will never please God, and will be led to death, while those who concentrate on matters of the Spirit will be led to life and peace.

⁶⁵⁹ Factions were teams that supported various charioteers or gladiators. The competitive rivalry among the charioteers and gladiators would often lead to rivalries between factions. Violence was often involved, which sometimes led to the intervention of soldiers to break up the fights.

⁶⁶⁰ Whether Augustine’s criticisms are based on real observations by himself or others, or perceptions of (unfamiliar) practices, is not entirely clear. Older studies, such as that of Bernhard Blumenkranz, argued that Jews had a strong presence in Augustine’s North African context, winning converts from both Christian and non-Christian circles, which led to Augustine’s polemical and pointed words against Judaism throughout his works. See Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen in den ersten Jahrhunderten* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973). Recent scholarship has confirmed that Jews did live in North Africa during Augustine’s time, but the size of the population and the Jewish practices that were engaged in is not clear. Most of the evidence comes from Augustine’s own works. Moreover, his works suggest that while Augustine did have interactions with Jews, they do not appear to be extensive. Jeremy Cohen argues that the references to Jews and Judaism in Augustine’s works show that he had virtually no personal experience with Jewish practices. His references to Judaism are formed by other theological concerns, namely the

But with Christ's passion, Augustine states in *in spir. et litt.* 15,27,⁶⁶¹ grace was unveiled, and the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath commandment was revealed, like the Temple veil being torn open. Augustine quotes 2 Cor 3:16: "When you have gone over to Christ, the veil will be removed." The meaning is that each person is a temple of God. When a person converts, their veil is torn, just like the veil in the Jewish Temple, and they are able to see the spiritual aspect of the Sabbath commandment. In this way, Augustine argues in *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19 that Christians are more the recipients of the commandment than the Jews, because Christians observe the commandment spiritually.

Augustine then states in *spir. et litt.* 15,27 that the "Sabbath is the day of sanctification." There is a reason "sanctification is first mentioned at the point where he [God] rested from all his works." There is also a reason people received "the

proper interpretation of the Old Testament, the history of God's salvation, and human sexuality. See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 41-44. See also Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 307-14. Fredriksen argues there is simply not enough evidence to determine the extent to which Augustine had contact with Jews, but she is somewhat more open to the possibility than Cohen. Fredriksen shows that Augustine did have some awareness of Judaism in his writings. For example, he knows that Jews celebrate Sukkoth by constructing booths and that the celebration lasts a week; he believes at first that Jews sacrifice a lamb for Passover, and then corrects himself later that the lamb is merely slaughtered in preparation for the celebration; and he is aware that not all Jews hold the same level of observance of their religious practices. Fredriksen also argues that Augustine must have had at least some contact with real Jews, either in public spaces or at the basilica (apparently Jews were not unknown to listen to sermons). We do know that he had at least one interaction with a Jew while arbitrating lawsuits (arbitration was part of his duties as bishop). The Jew's name was Licinius, and the fact of being a Jew did not appear to influence Augustine's arbitration one way or the other. Cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Dancing, Clapping, Meditating: Jewish and Christian Observances of the Sabbath in Pseudo-Ignatius," in *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity*, eds. Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 29-51. Cohen has no doubt Augustine's observations of Jewish Sabbath practices are real, at least when it comes to dancing (Cohen focuses primarily on dancing, but his analysis could be extended to Augustine's observations of self-indulgence and consuming alcohol, as well). Cohen bases his argument on his own interpretation of mishnaic (m. Beitzah 5:2) and talmudic (y. Shabbat 15:3 [15a] and b. Beitzah 30a) texts that discuss a prohibition on dancing on the Sabbath. Comparing these with the Augustinian texts discussed above and pseudo-Ignatius' *To the Magnesians* 9, among other patristic texts, Cohen concludes that dancing occurred among various (non)rabbinic Jewish communities in multiple locations throughout late antiquity (for Cohen, whether these Jewish communities were rabbinic is difficult to discern, as a prohibition on dancing is not uniformly held; the Mishnah is against it, while the Bavli allows it). Thus, what Augustine witnessed in north Africa must have been a non-rabbinic Jewish practice, or at least a practice prohibited by the Mishnah.

⁶⁶¹ For parallels to Augustine's exegesis, see *Spir. et litt.* 14,23; s. 248.4 and 250.3.

commandment to abstain from all servile work” on the Sabbath. With Augustine, servile work entails sin,⁶⁶² and sanctification has to do with the absence or cessation of sin. Thus, it is no coincidence that sanctification, rest, and servile work are mentioned together with the Sabbath. For, to observe the Sabbath means to rest from servile work (i.e., to stop sinning), and to stop sinning means to undergo sanctification. Therefore, to observe the Sabbath is to be sanctified.⁶⁶³ In *s.* 179A.3, Augustine adds that God grants humanity the ability to not sin, and when one places one’s hope in God to no longer sin, that person is now celebrating the Sabbath. The implication is that for Augustine, observance of the Sabbath does not occur one day of the week, but should occur unceasingly.

3.5.3 Sabbath as Rest in Mind and Spirit

In Augustine’s comparison of the third commandment to the third plague in *s.* 8.6 and 8.18, he states that the Holy Spirit sanctifies people by giving them “quietness of heart” and “tranquility of mind,” which are the “product of a good conscience.”⁶⁶⁴ Only the Spirit can do the work of sanctification.⁶⁶⁵ Those who experience this sanctification

⁶⁶² In *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19., Augustine quotes Jn 8:34, which reads, “everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.” So, to engage in servile work is to engage in sin.

⁶⁶³ See Teske, *To Know God*, 64. Teske argues that the spiritual interpretation of the Sabbath is also designed to prevent people from thinking that God literally rests or needs rest. God is very much still active, and rests, as humanity should, only in possessing peace and possessing no sin.

⁶⁶⁴ Augustine quotes Isa 66:2 and Ps 46:10.

For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis see *ep.* 55.20.

⁶⁶⁵ See *s.* 8.17. Sanctification is what links the Spirit to the seventh day, the only day which God sanctifies during the creation. It is also fitting that it is the seventh day, because the Holy Spirit is identified with the number seven. Augustine provides various reasons that the number seven is identified with the Spirit, including an exegesis of the number fifty for Pentecost. Fifty is composed of seven times seven, plus one. The seven signifies the Spirit, and the one signifies the Spirit’s work, which is to bring people together as one. Fifty days after the resurrection comes Pentecost, which is the day of the Spirit’s arrival. Jesus remains on earth for forty days, and then ascends into heaven. That leaves ten days till Pentecost. Those ten days are a sign of the Ten Commandments. On one’s own, one cannot keep the Ten Commandments. Thus, the Spirit comes after the tenth day, which signifies the necessity of the Spirit to follow the Decalogue.

experience the “true holiday” of the spiritual Sabbath, holding the Sabbath in their hearts.⁶⁶⁶ Those without the Holy Spirit are unquiet, “loving quarrels, spreading slanders, keener on argument than on truth,” letting “idle fancies fly around and sting you,” refusing to be still, demanding an understanding of God that does not require faith.⁶⁶⁷

In the third plague, gnats wreak havoc on the Egyptians. Like those who break the third commandment, gnats are “restless in the extreme, flying about aimlessly, swarming into your eyes, not letting a body rest,” constantly returning as soon as someone shoos them away. Augustine then warns his listeners to be wary of the plague they will receive if they choose to break the third commandment and become unquiet. He ends by reflecting on why the magicians fail to reproduce the third plague. Augustine argues their failure was because they did not have the Holy Spirit. Their entire goal was to bring disunity, the opposite of what the Holy Spirit seeks, so as a punishment, the Holy Spirit brought on them the third plague. When the magicians admit that the plague is the “finger of God” (see Exod 8:19), they mean that it is the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶⁸

3.5.4 The Sabbath vs. The Lord’s Day

The Sabbath, or the seventh day, Augustine explains in *ep.* 55.17-23, was originally given to the Jews as a day of rest for the physical body. But this was merely a

⁶⁶⁶ For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *c. Faust* 19.18.

⁶⁶⁷ For example, in *c. Faust* 15.7, Augustine argues that the Manicheans violate the Sabbath because their souls are made restless from “the illusions of so many figments of your imagination.” It would seem they cannot rest, because they cannot properly conceive of God as spirit.

⁶⁶⁸ As noted above, Augustine interprets the finger of God that writes the Decalogue as the Spirit. It is no coincidence that the Law was given fifty days after the slaughtering of the sheep at Passover. It signifies perfectly Christ’s sacrifice, and the coming of the Spirit fifty days later (see footnote 665).

symbol of the rest Christians now receive in the Holy Spirit.⁶⁶⁹ The Sabbath, in its spiritual sense, as discussed above, means rest from sin. This occurs after Christians undergo conversion; that is, when they return from “exile”⁶⁷⁰ and their “first life”⁶⁷¹ is restored (*reditur*). This return from exile and restoration is symbolized in the Lord’s Day, the eighth day,⁶⁷² on which Jesus was resurrected, a reality revealed only to Christians.⁶⁷³ After the resurrection, Augustine states, the Lord’s Day was thenceforth celebrated on its own, apart from the Sabbath.⁶⁷⁴

Augustine calls attention to the fact that the seventh day has no evening in Genesis. The reason for this is that in addition to rest from sin, the seventh day also symbolizes *eternal* rest, a day without end. In this way, the Sabbath is a sacrament

⁶⁶⁹ This is the rest that is described, Augustine states, in Ps 46:11 and Matt 11:28-29.

⁶⁷⁰ Probably a reference to the Fall, and the exile from Eden.

⁶⁷¹ Or the life we were meant to have before Adam sinned in the garden.

⁶⁷² If the Sabbath is the first day, then the Lord’s Day, the day of the resurrection, occurs one day after it on the eighth day. The eighth day, though, is also the first day of the week. The significance of this is that the first life is like the first day, in that both will find restoration and eternal rest in the eighth day.

⁶⁷³ Yet, Augustine also states that the patriarchs knew something of the Lord’s Day. For example, Ps 7:1 refers to the “eighth,” as does Eccl 11:2, and babies are circumcised on the eighth day. But the full understanding of the Lord’s Day was not made fully known. The Jews were only told to celebrate the Sabbath. One needs the resurrection to fully understand the Lord’s Day.

⁶⁷⁴ Constantine, in 321, decreed that Sunday would be a day of rest from work; however, whether he was trying to accommodate Christians is not entirely clear. From his reference to the Sun in his decree, it seems that his primary focus and model was Roman religion. According to Richard Bauckham, there were few Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries who promoted theological reasons for rest on Sunday. This included Augustine. It appears that many thought cessation of work was not considered beneficial or desirable, unless it was for the worship of God. Augustine’s ideas of Sabbath as a shadow of the eternal rest and cessation of sin was preceded by other Christian theologians before him (e.g., Tertullian in *Adv. Jud.* 4; Origen in *Num. Hom.* 23:4; and Eusebius in *Ps. 91 Comm.*). See Richard J. Bauckham “Sabbath and Sunday in the Post-Apostolic Church,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 280-287; and Richard J. Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church in the West,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 300-302. Augustine’s exegesis of the Sabbath commandment has had an enormous impact on medieval Christianity. For a survey of the development of medieval understandings of the Sabbath and Lord’s Day, see Bauckham, “Sabbath and Sunday in the Medieval Church,” 300-309; and Daniel Augsburger, “The Sabbath and the Lord’s Day During the Middle Ages,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 190-214.

(*sacramentum*)⁶⁷⁵ that points to something more: the eighth day,⁶⁷⁶ which initiates the final rest, where happiness and rest will have no end.⁶⁷⁷ It should be emphasized that Augustine does not consider the Lord's Day a day of physical rest. It fulfills the Sabbath by initiating the final rest that Christians will receive after this life. Souls, according to Augustine, were made to love rest. Like oil in water, the soul in one's body seeks to rise up toward rest, and will only find it in God, who alone can offer true and eternal rest.⁶⁷⁸ In fact, when we rest, God rests, as well, with us. The body can find certain enjoyments in this life. But the body cannot find rest for very long, and for this reason, the body, in the end, will only weigh a soul down. After this life, a Christian will have full, everlasting rest. This is the goal which Christians in this life hope for and strive toward with their good works.⁶⁷⁹ Augustine states in *s.* 9.3 that this is the opposite logic of his listeners. They would seek rest in order to work, but the truth of the matter is that they should do good works in faith and hope of the eternal rest in the Kingdom. If we return to the metaphor of the harp in *s.* 9.13, Augustine explains, in a similar vein, that to touch the third string is to slay something far worse than a beast: the "love of this world." This is the motivation of those who "slave away at all their affairs." The opposite is the case for

⁶⁷⁵ As noted above, among many things, *sacramenta* can refer to certain cultic practices. In the case of the Sabbath, it functioned as a weekly holiday of physical rest in the Old Testament. As a *sacramentum*, it points to the Lord's Day, and the full rest one will experience in the next life. The purpose of sacraments like the Sabbath are to inspire Christians to love, so that they might work toward rest. Humans need spiritual matters communicated to them with the aid of physical (*corporalis*) terms. It is sacraments that accomplish this, and by doing this, they generate interest, delight, and appreciation far more than the truth would have without them. see Cutrone, 741-747. See also Cameron, 91-92. Cameron argues that for Augustine, the meaning of the Sabbath as a sacrament is meant as a mediation. What the Sabbath mediates is Christ who offers eternal rest.

⁶⁷⁶ Cf., e.g., *civ.* 22.30.

⁶⁷⁷ For a parallel to Augustine's exegesis, see *s.* 8.17 and *s.* 9.6.

⁶⁷⁸ Augustine cites Ps 37:4.

⁶⁷⁹ For this line of reasoning, Augustine draws on Rom 8:24, which he quotes: "we have been saved in hope, but hope that is seen is no longer hope."

a Christian: such a person performs good works diligently for the sake of the eternal rest that God promises.

3.5.5 The Issue of God Resting

For Augustine, the idea of God resting from labor, as expressed in Exod 20:11 and Gen 2:2, seems entirely impossible.⁶⁸⁰ After all, Augustine argues in *s.* 179A.3 that there is no possible way God could have grown tired from creating all things, since the only action God took was to speak. Even humans would not tire from doing this.

Augustine reasons that when Gen 2:2 states that God rested, it means that God causes a Christian to rest from sin.⁶⁸¹ However, in *s.* 251.5, Augustine takes a different interpretive turn, arguing the text indicates that God's eternal existence is, in a sense, rest. The meaning of Gen 2:2 (and by implication, Exod 20:11) is that when Christians reach the kingdom, they will experience eternity, which for a human will feel like rest without end.

The seventh day is a symbol of this rest.⁶⁸² Augustine then explains that the reason

⁶⁸⁰ Augustine does not argue this explicitly in reference to Exod 20:11, but resting would imply that God is mutable. See Teske, *To Know God*, 134, and 150. Augustine states in *civ.* 12,17, "We are not permitted to believe that God is affected in one way when he rests and in another way when he works, since he must not be said to be affected, as if something comes to be in his nature that was not previously there. For one who is affected is acted upon, as everything undergoes something is mutable." Translation from Teske, *To Know God*, 134. In other words, to say that God rests from work would be to say that work has an effect on God and that God's substance can change. Moreover, it would be to affirm that God is temporal, subject to change through time. In contrast, the very nature of eternity is to be present at every moment, which is to be unchanged by time.

⁶⁸¹ Strictly speaking, Augustine's interpretation would not be supported by his Latin translation of Gen 2:2, and also Exod 20:11. The word for "rest" in both texts is *requievit*, a perfect active indicative.

⁶⁸² For more on Augustine's understanding of heaven and his Greco-Roman context, see Gillian Clark, "Paradise for Pagans? Augustine on Virgil, Cicero, and Plato," in *Paradise in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Views*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Guy Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 166-178; and J. Kevin Coyle, "Adapted Discourse: Heaven in Augustine's *City of God* and in His Contemporary Preaching," *Augustinian Studies* 30:2 (1999): 205-219. Heaven, for Augustine, is "a good place for the soul." Here, nothing will fall to decay. There will be no fear, pain, or strife. No one will sin, which means that everyone will do God's will without any hindrance. People will experience peace and tranquility with each other. One's resurrected body will be the same body, but will be a transformed,

Gen 2:2 states that God performs the action of sanctification is to signify that when Christians reach their eternal rest, their own “sanctification will be complete.”⁶⁸³

In a similar vein, Augustine states in *s.* 9.6 that God did not rest on the seventh day because God was tired, but to demonstrate for humanity what life could be: as God did good works and then rested, so too humans, if they persevere in their good works, will experience the eternal rest that God ceaselessly does. Thus, to do good works with the hope of eternal rest in mind is to observe the Sabbath. This eternal rest, Augustine describes in *s.* 9.21, entails “complete freedom from care,” absolute rest, “where even the very works of mercy will have ceased, because there will be no unfortunate in need there.” Augustine calls this eternal rest the “sabbath of sabbaths.”

3.6 CONCLUSION

Taken together, Augustine’s diverse comments on Exod 20:3-11 provide a broad picture of sin and salvation. Amidst the diversity are two general, interrelated approaches to the Decalogue that guide Augustine’s interpretations. The first is Augustine’s distinction between *uti* (“use”) and *frui* (“enjoyment”). According to Augustine, the Decalogue’s double commandment of love is designed to guide humanity toward the enjoyment of God.

The path toward that end, however, is inhibited by sin, and in particular, imitated and inherited sin. Both are spoken of in Exod 20:5. The former occurs when one chooses

spiritual body. With this body, one will be able to grasp reason entirely, communicate impeccably, and see God perfectly in the beatific vision.

⁶⁸³ For a parallel to Augustine’s exegesis, see *s.* 8.17.

to imitate the sin of another person. When one does this, one receives punishment both for one's own sin and also the person whom one imitated. The latter is Original Sin, and was brought into the world through Adam. Its effects cause guilt, a weakened human nature, disordered desire, and disordered ignorance of God and the Law. While baptism removes the guilt of Original Sin, the other effects can only be dissipated through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and one's effort to uphold the double commandment. Lack of effort leads to exclusion from the kingdom.

In light of all of this, the purpose of the Decalogue becomes clear. In response to humanity's disordered ignorance, the Decalogue reveals how to act, what is right, what is just. Here, Augustine's second general approach comes into view. Augustine believes a true understanding of the first three commandments requires a spiritual interpretation. Each commandment centers on one member of the trinity: the first refers to the Father, the second to the Son, and the third to the Holy Spirit.

More specifically, the first commandment (Exod 20:3-6) reveals and directs an individual toward a correct knowledge of God. It teaches that God can only be seen through the intellect—that is, through one's knowledge of God. All words and thoughts, however, fall short of full comprehension of God—who is ultimately ineffable.

The second commandment (Exod 20:7) instructs a correct knowledge of the Son, identifying the creed as articulating the minimum tenets one must possess. Rendered negatively, the second commandment is designed to protect an individual from all heresies.

Finally, the third commandment (Exod 20:8-11) directs one toward the cessation of all sins, which in turn will lead to rest in mind and spirit. Included within this

commandment is a call to imitate God. As God did good works and rested, so too humans, if they diligently love God and others, will enter into the eternal rest that God ceaselessly experiences.

Altogether, the first three commandments reveal that the love of God entails proper belief *and* practice. What one thinks about God and how one goes about it are critical; so too are the ways in which one acts in the world. Put another way, all things can either be used or enjoyed. If one successfully loves God and neighbor for the sake of God alone, one will be led to eternal rest and enjoyment of God.

Having surveyed both Augustine and contemporary evangelical commentaries on the Decalogue, we turn next to the heart of the dissertation: a commentary of the *Mekhilta*, and a comparison between all three voices.

4.0 CHAPTER 4: *MEKHILTA D'RABBI ISHMAEL*: FIRST WORD

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”

-Exod 20:2

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Having completed our survey and analysis of the evangelical and Augustine’s commentaries of the Decalogue, we turn now to the *Mekhilta*. In what follows, I divide the *Mekhilta*’s commentary on each word into separate chapters. Within each chapter, I focus on each of the midrashim individually. For each midrash, I move in three steps. I first begin with Lauterbach’s translation. In the footnotes, I annotate significant textual variants to Lauterbach’s version, along with alternate translations. Next, I offer a supercommentary on the midrash, explicating method, content, and historical context. After this, I engage in a brief comparison of the *Mekhilta*, Augustine, and the evangelical commentators’ exegeses, followed by a reflection on insights a Christian might glean for his/her own understanding of the Decalogue. My goal with the supercommentary is not to describe every possible meaning the midrashim hold. Rather, my intent is to facilitate the reader’s understanding. The same goes with my comparisons and constructive proposals: my goal is not to list every point of comparison and insight; rather, I identify one or two of what I believe are the most significant points of comparison and learning that a

Christian reader may derive from the process. I fully expect that readers may derive many others of their own.

The *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the First Word of the Decalogue is located in *Bahodesh* 5 of Lauterbach's edition.⁶⁸⁴ This commentary can be divided into twelve distinct midrashim, which I have identified as A.1 through A.12 for the purpose of convenient referencing. The exposition in this chapter concentrates on six of the midrashim. These midrashim are:

1. Midrash A.1 – which determines the relationship between *halakhah* (legal material) and *aggadah* (narrative).
2. Midrash A.2 – which centers on a negotiation between God and Israel concerning the contents of the Sinai covenant.
3. Midrash A.3 – which presents an argument against a rabbinic theological heresy known as the Two Powers.
4. Midrash A.5 – which reflects on the effect God's revelation of Torah to Israel will have on the rest of the world.
5. Midrash A.6 – which argues why only Israel received the Torah, and not the rest of the world.
6. Midrash A.10 – which discusses the availability of Torah to the rest of the world.

The discussion of each midrash will be largely independent from the others and seemingly discursive. This is the nature of midrashic compilations in general.

Nevertheless, there are some connections that I will attempt to make. In addition, at the end of the chapter, I will offer a concluding remark about the *Mekhilta*'s exegesis of the First Word as a whole. While the vast majority of evangelical commentators view Exod 20:2 as a prologue to the Decalogue, the *Mekhilta* understands the verse as the first commandment. Individually, each of the *Mekhilta*'s midrashim gives only partial indication of what exactly Exod 20:2 is commanding. My argument in the conclusion will be that when all of the *Mekhilta*'s midrashim on the First Word are viewed together, it

⁶⁸⁴ Lauterbach, 313-318. The First Word is located in *Yitro* 5 of the Horowitz-Rabin edition (219-222), which follows the Babylonian reading order.

will become clear that the *Mekhilta* views the First Word as a commandment to engage in theology. This presents an opportunity for evangelicals to see Exod 20:2 not simply as background information, but as a call to explore the depths of God and God’s relationship with creation.

4.2 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA A.1

I Am the Lord Thy God. Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah? They give a parable. To what may this be compared? To the following: A king⁶⁸⁵ who entered⁶⁸⁶ a province⁶⁸⁷ said to the people: May I be your king?⁶⁸⁸ But the people said to him: Have you done anything good⁶⁸⁹ for us that you should rule over us?⁶⁹⁰ What did he do then? He built the city wall for them, he brought in the water supply for them, and he fought their battles. Then when he said to them: May I be your king?⁶⁹¹ They said to him: Yes, yes. Likewise, God. He brought the Israelites out of Egypt, divided the sea for them, sent down the manna for them, brought up the well for them, brought the quails for them. He fought for them the battle with Amaleq. Then He said to them: I am to be your king. And they said to Him: Yes, yes.

⁶⁸⁵ Instead of לַמֶּלֶךְ (a king), the Horowitz-Rabin edition has לְאָדָם (a person). The Horowitz-Rabin variant can give the sense that the king enters a province without claiming or revealing his royal identity.

⁶⁸⁶ The word for “entered” is נָכַנס, a Niphal of כָּנַס, which can have an active meaning (to enter), but can also have a passive meaning, such as “be brought in.” It can also carry a connotation of marriage, as in “to be married.”

⁶⁸⁷ The word for “province” is מְדִינָה, which can also mean “large city” or “country.”

⁶⁸⁸ Lauterbach chooses to portray the king’s speech (אֲמַלִּיךְ עֲלֵיכֶם) as a question. However, the speech could also be translated as a declaration or demand: e.g., “I will rule over you!”

⁶⁸⁹ Lauterbach includes טוֹבָה (“good”), based on its appearance in *Yalqut Shimoni* and the Leghorn edition. The Horowitz-Rabin edition also adds טוֹבָה, and notes that it is lacking in the Oxford manuscript, Munich manuscript, and the printed editions. Whether or not טוֹבָה is included in the people’s speech can change the level of God’s involvement in Israel’s slavery to Egypt, which I will discuss in the body of the text.

⁶⁹⁰ The unified response of “have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us,” in addition to the unified “yes, yes” later in the parable, reflects the second person singular object of Exod 20:2: אֶלֶיךָ. One might expect “your” in v. 2 to be plural (כֶּם-), as a multitude of Israelites stand before God at Sinai. The singular “your” could be seen as a grammatical error, but this could be seen by the midrash as an opportunity to view Israel as unified in its responses to God. The midrash, however, does not state this specifically.

⁶⁹¹ The same speech appears again: אֲמַלִּיךְ עֲלֵיכֶם. One could also portray it as a demand or a question. Additionally, the first could be seen as a question and the second as a demand (and vice versa).

The *Mekhilta*'s very first comment on the Decalogue opens with a question: "Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah?" The question implies that the commandments are the most important part of God's revelation.⁶⁹² Why, then, are they not introduced until halfway through Exodus? The answer is given in the form of a parable. A king enters an unspecified province to become the king of the people residing there. Upon asking or demanding (see footnote 688) to be king, the people respond, "Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us?"⁶⁹³ Not all versions of the text include the word "good" in the people's response (see footnote 689). Whether the word appears alters the dynamic between the king and the people. The presence of the word suggests the king has a questionable reputation or a tenuous prior relationship with the people. The absence of the word suggests the people do not know the king or hitherto have not interacted with him in a substantive way. Contemporary scholars debate whether one can determine original texts of rabbinic literature.⁶⁹⁴ Rather than weighing in on the matter for our particular midrash, I simply emphasize that the inclusion of this word has a significant impact on the meaning of the text. Whichever may be the people's reply, the king responds by getting to work, acting exactly as a king would: he builds a wall, brings in water, fights the people's battles. These actions signal

⁶⁹² One can find in this interpretation a special privileging of the Decalogue over the other commandments. The *Mekhilta* may be offering this as a possible position, and indeed, this may have been the intention of the original author of the parable. The general trend of the *Mekhilta*, however, implies that the parable should not be read as promoting a belief that the other commandments of Torah are less authoritative or excluded from implicit inclusion in the parable.

⁶⁹³ The tone of the response could range from humble to haughty. The text is open to both.

⁶⁹⁴ For a summary of issues surrounding textual criticism and the search for the "original text," see Chaim Milikowsky, "Reflections on the Practice of Textual Criticism in the Study of Midrash Aggadah. The Legitimacy, the Indispensability and the Feasibility of Recovering and Presenting the (Most) Original Text," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Leiden: Brill, 2006, 79-109. See also Burton L. Visotzky, "On Critical Editions of Midrash," in *Recent Developments in Midrash Research: Proceedings from the 2002 and 2003 SBL Consultation on Midrash*, eds. Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2005), 155-162.

to the people that this king can be an effective ruler for them—and indeed, this king’s actions have earned him this right. After the king asks again to be their king, the people reply, “Yes, yes.”

The *Mekhilta* then gives the *nimshal* (explanation of the parable): in a similar way, God approaches Israel and asks to be king.⁶⁹⁵ The people inquire as to whether God has done anything (good) to deserve that role. Without the word “good,” the parable suggests that God had been absent during Israel’s slavery in Egypt. Thus, the people respond, “Have you done anything [at all] for us which would justify you ruling over us?” In other words, *we have suffered in slavery, and you did nothing to prevent it*. This would connect well with Exod 2:23-25, in which Israel cries out to God in slavery, and God “heard their groaning and God remembered (וַיִּזְכֹּר) his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice (וַיִּדַּע) of them.” The oddity of God having to “remember” the covenant and “take notice” of Israel in the biblical text receives explanation through the parable. The *reason* is not fully evident, but the parable leads one to the conclusion that the biblical text is willing to admit that God can indeed neglect or forget God’s own promises.⁶⁹⁶ Seen in this way, Israel’s response in

⁶⁹⁵ The *nimshal* does not explicitly explain the identity of the province in the parable; however, one can presume this province is either Israel or Egypt. The former is preferable, since God’s primary action is to fortify and provide for this province. The image that the parable is working with is of Israel as a city or country (see footnote 687). As the parable underscores, this is a city under development, and when the biblical context is considered, this is a mobile city, headed toward the Land of Israel.

⁶⁹⁶ The parable may also suggest that because God neglected Israel in its slavery to Egypt, God lost the privilege of being Israel’s king and must now request to be reinstated. Alternatively, the parable may envision God’s relationship to Israel as a marriage (see footnote 686). As a human groom cannot force a bride to marry him, so too God cannot force Israel into marriage. The king *mashal* is one of the most common and pervasive tropes in rabbinic parables. The king *mashal* usually revolves around a human king or God as king (with human qualities). For the definitive study of this trope and rabbinic parables in general, see David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

the parable arises either from exacerbation about God's absence, or from a lack of recognition of who God is (see below for more on this point).

However, with the word “good,” the parable suggests that God had a role to play in Israel's slavery. Hence, Israel rhetorically and almost sarcastically responds, “Have you done anything *good* for us that would justify you ruling over us?” This interpretation would fit well with Gen 15:13, in which God tells Abram, during their covenant-making ceremony, that the Israelites will be slaves in a foreign land for four hundred years. The active verb in v. 13 is *יִהְיֶינָה* (“they will be”), which presents a degree of ambiguity as to the cause of their enslavement. God's action is made explicit only in v. 14, when the verse states that God will “bring judgment (*יָבִיץְ*) on the nation that they serve.” The addition of “good” in the parable would resolve the ambiguity of the biblical text by placing the responsibility on God for the enslavement of Israel.

God responds by bringing the people out of Egypt (Exod 12:30-14:4); dividing the sea (14:5-15:21); providing manna (16:1-12, 14-36), water (17:1-7), and quails (16:13); and defeating Amaleq in battle (17:8-16).⁶⁹⁷ The point that the *nimshal*

⁶⁹⁷ One might ask whether God's actions are meant to align with the actions of the parable's king. If so, the actions between Exodus 12-17 can be divided into three categories. The first is the building of the city wall: this takes the form of God's ushering Israel out of slavery, out of harm's way, and protecting Israel from the pursuing Egyptian army. The walls of the Red Sea parallel the walls of the city that is Israel. The second is the bringing in of the water: this takes the form of God providing manna, water, and quails. The third is the fighting of the battles: this takes the form of God defeating Amaleq. These three actions could be seen as the three primary activities of God in relation to Israel—what God pledges to do as Israel's king. In this way, God provides the necessary conditions for Israel to develop and thrive as a city.

God as the sole agent of redemption is underscored more deeply in *Pesikta Rabbati* 21:9. For an English translation, see William G. Braude, trans., *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 430. Paragraph numbers for *Pesikta Rabbati* in chapter 4 of this dissertation follow Braude's. In one interpretation, R. Yudan argues that the angels attempt to assist God in rescuing God's children from the Egyptians, but God dismisses them, preferring to enact redemption alone. R. Yudan likens this to a king whose son is captured. The intensity of emotion that such an incident evokes stirs within one the desire to act alone. In a similar way, God desires to obtain Israel's redemption by God's self. In another interpretation, R. Judah II the Patriarch distinguishes God's activity from a mere human king's. While a human king engages in a battle with an entire army, God in God's power and greatness has no need of aid, and so God engages the Egyptians by God's self.

emphasizes is that the Torah cannot begin with the Ten Commandments, as their reception requires this prior relationship.

As David Stern notes, rabbinic parables are frequently riddled with blatant and intended ambiguities. The purpose is to allow the reader to discover the parable's "suggestive openings for questioning of meaning; in this way [the parable] artfully manipulates its audience to fill those openings so as to arrive at the [parable's] correct conclusion."⁶⁹⁸ For our parable, one major ambiguity is God's status as king. According to the parable, God is a king before approaching Israel, and yet, God asks to be Israel's king. This raises the question of *over whom exactly* God had been king. More interestingly, if Israel were to deny God's offer, would God be divested of kingship? The parable gives no definitive answer to either question, but only hints at the reality that God's own identity is at stake in the entire exodus and Sinai affair.

Another significant ambiguity is the timeframe of the parable. When exactly does it take place? Its presentation as a comment on Exod 20:2 suggests Sinai. Thus, on this mountain, God asks to be Israel's king. But this is long after God brings the Israelites out of Egypt, divides the sea, sends down the manna, etc.—which is the primary content of the parable. I believe the parable itself indicates the timeframe, when it has God ask twice to be king. The second time is at Sinai. The first is much earlier, perhaps when Aaron returns to the people after his meeting with Moses in Exod 4:27-31. Curiously, in the biblical text, after Aaron speaks to the people and performs the signs before them, Exod 4:31 states, "the people believed (אָמְנוּ)." What exactly do they believe? Do they not already know God? As stated earlier, the answer may actually be in the negative. The

⁶⁹⁸ Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 15.

last time the Israelites appeared in the biblical text was in Exod 2:23, groaning and crying out to an *unidentified* audience. It would appear that the parable is answering a question that is left open in the biblical text: what do the Israelites believe before Aaron's return? It does not seem to be anything related to God. Thus, it follows that God must ask to be their king,⁶⁹⁹ and God must enact the events of the exodus in order to justify that God can indeed fulfill this role.⁷⁰⁰

By the end of its explication, the parable answers the question initially posed: "Why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah?" The parable argues that the narrative and commandments are mutually dependent and inseparable. In the absence of acting kingly (in the narrative), God cannot claim to be king (and give commandments effectively). How could God be a trustworthy king without proving God's credentials? Moreover, what right does God have to be king if God has not done anything beneficial for Israel?⁷⁰¹ Likewise, in the absence of a response of loyalty, Israel does not deserve the kingly actions of God. How could Israel go its own way after God

⁶⁹⁹ Similarly, in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 21:11, R. Phinehas likens Israel to a child who grew up without his father, the king. After the child is grown, he meets his father at long last, but mistakes his father for a general and then a governor. Finally, the father intervenes and informs his son that he is in fact the son's father. Similarly, when God meets Israel at Sinai, Israel mistakes God for the angels Michael and Gabriel. God is forced to interject, letting Israel know which of the heavenly beings is actually God. The implication of R. Phinehas' parable is that God was absent during the slavery in Egypt. Having never met God, Israel did not know how to identify God when the meeting finally happens. Read in light of *Pesiqta Rabbati*, the *Mekhilta* may also be promoting this idea.

⁷⁰⁰ It is worth noting that the *Mekhilta* begins with Exodus 12. The *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai*, a parallel midrashic collection on Exodus redacted in the amoraic period, contains brief commentary on Exod 3-6 in its first tractate, which leads one to wonder, if the *Mekhilta* contained commentary on Exodus 1-11—or at one point actually did—would our midrash have appeared earlier in the compilation? An earlier appearance would resolve some of the ambiguities, and create different meanings.

⁷⁰¹ In other words, the narrative sets the context or "frame" or reason for the commandments. See Max Kadushin, *A Conceptual Approach to the Mekilta: How the Spiritual Values of the Talmud and Midrash Arise from the Bible* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 25-28.

has provided for it extensively? The exodus story and the Decalogue, then, belong together.⁷⁰² Without the other, *both* will succumb to disarray.

The parable also resolves another issue: from a rabbinic perspective, there appears to be extraneous, unneeded information in this verse. It begins, “I am the Lord your God.” One might think that is sufficient information for a commandment. But the verse then goes on to state, “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Is this not already known? Unless the Israelites have suddenly experienced a severe bout of amnesia, the events of the exodus would be difficult to forget. The parable resolves the issue, however, by linking commandment to story in the following way: it makes memory of the past a commandment, where Israel must not (and cannot) simply accept God as Lord; it must also recall the relational history Israel has had with God, for without that recollection, one might very well ask, “Have you done anything for us that justifies your rule over us?”

4.2.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The Christian commentators and the *Mekhilta* share a deep concern with the relationship between law and narrative. But how they frame the question is done in opposite ways. While the Christian commentators ask how the law is related to narrative, the *Mekhilta* wonders how narrative is related to law. This difference is built on the presuppositions of each tradition, which in turn leads each tradition to different

⁷⁰² The story also embodies the dynamic nature of the covenant between God and Israel: that neither side is without responsibility toward the other, and that while there is indeed a power differential, that does not preclude Israel’s right to require that God act like the king God desires or claims to be (see A.2 below).

conclusions. The Christian commentators begin with the story of Christ and the redemption of the world through grace. Since salvation is received instead of earned, the commentators ask if there is any purpose to the Law. According to Augustine, the Law reveals what is right and just, and, with the aid of the Spirit, leads a Christian to eternal life, or knowledge of God.⁷⁰³ The evangelical commentators move in a similar direction. Stuart argues that though the Law itself does not save a person, it enables one to “draw near to God,” and reveals how a person who has already been saved should now live.⁷⁰⁴ Similarly, Fretheim states that the Law ensures that a person will become what God intended and will do God’s will in the world.⁷⁰⁵ For Dozeman, obedience to the Law in the non-P material leads to an exclusive relationship with God, while in the P material, it leads to Israel becoming a kingdom of priests and holy nation.⁷⁰⁶ As pointed out in chapter 2, many of these evangelical comments are influenced by the New Perspective and a desire to depict the Law in a positive light.

In contrast, the *Mekhilta* presumes the commandments are of utmost importance. The midrash itself does not state explicitly why this is the case. One could, however, extrapolate from the midrash a belief that the commandments are what define God as king and Israel as God’s subject. Without the commandments, there is no relationship. What is a ruler without rules?⁷⁰⁷ The *Mekhilta* asks, if the commandments are the most important, why does narrative come *before* the commandments? The *Mekhilta*’s answer shares some important similarities with the evangelical commentators. Namely, many of

⁷⁰³ *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19-21; 122, 8-9; s. 8.

⁷⁰⁴ Stuart, 44-45. See also Enns, 387-389.

⁷⁰⁵ Fretheim, 210-213.

⁷⁰⁶ Dozeman, 445-446.

⁷⁰⁷ Within the internal logic of the *maschal*, when the king approaches the people, the king asks if he can rule over them. When the people consent, the king is able to impose the Decalogue. Without the Decalogue, the king is not a ruler over the people.

the evangelical commentators agree with the *Mekhilta* that the redemption from Egypt grants God the right to impose commandments over Israel,⁷⁰⁸ and God's redemption of Israel necessitates a pledge of loyalty from Israel. Thus, Law without narrative (i.e., the redemption of Israel) would render God's rule illegitimate.

Beyond this similarity, the difference in presuppositions between each tradition leads each in ultimately different directions. The question about the necessity of the Law, for the Christian commentators, leads to interpretations that revolve around the Law's nature and benefit for Israel/Christians. Meanwhile, the question about the necessity of narrative, for the *Mekhilta*, leads to interpretations that revolve around God's nature and benefit for Israel. The *Mekhilta* argues that God must prove to Israel that God is a worthy king, not through promise, but through action. Moreover, the *Mekhilta* suggests that God's own identity is at stake, both in Israel's response and Israel's condition. If Israel rejects God's offer of kingship or falls into peril in the future, God's right to kingship is rightly brought into question. Similar to the *Mekhilta*, some of the evangelical commentators argue that Israel had the prerogative to reject God's offer of a covenant.⁷⁰⁹ Thus, Israel is not a slave and does have rights. Also similar to the *Mekhilta*, some of the evangelical commentators engage in theological inquiry about God's nature. Alexander and Ryken, for example, argue that the Decalogue's commandments reveal that God is sovereign and omnipotent.⁷¹⁰ But despite these similarities, the *Mekhilta* offers an understanding of God that challenges and extends evangelical commentary. The *Mekhilta*'s understanding conceives of a relationship in which Israel has the right to

⁷⁰⁸ E.g., see Alexander, 96; Bailey, 218, 479; Garrett, 54; Hamilton, 328; Harman, 214; Larsson, 140-141; Motyer, 215-216; Pokrifka, 216; Roper, 322; Ryken, 484, 518.

⁷⁰⁹ E.g., Ashby, 88; Gowan, 175-177, 182, 187.

⁷¹⁰ Alexander, 104; Ryken 485.

demand certain provisions from God, and that God's own status and reputation are contingent on God's ability to provide them. This dynamic does not end at Sinai. The implication of the *Mekhilta's* parable is that God's redemption of Israel is not a one-time act that forever grants God the right to be Israel's sovereign, come what may, but is an act that sets in motion a relationship that expects God will continue to act the same way going forward.

While emphasis among the evangelical commentators has rightly been placed on the purpose and benefit of the Law for Israel/Christianity (not least of which is to dispel erroneous views of the Law), the *Mekhilta* points out that the question of the relationship between Law and narrative not only speaks to Israel's obligations, but God's as well. God's claim to kingship requires that God *act* like a king. If this does not happen, it would appear one can rightly ask, "Have you done anything good for us that you should rule over us?" That may seem a bold question for an evangelical, especially if one is used to thinking of God's omnipotence as license to do as God pleases. It may even seem blasphemous. But the *Mekhilta* points out that such a question does not end or place in jeopardy a relationship, but is the very thing that energizes it.

4.3 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* A.2

Rabbi says: This proclaims the excellence of Israel. For when they all stood before⁷¹¹ mount Sinai to receive the Torah they all made up their mind alike to accept the reign of God joyfully. Furthermore, they pledged

⁷¹¹ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition curiously have על (upon) instead of לפני (before), as they all, according to Exodus, did not ascend the mountain.

themselves⁷¹² for one another.⁷¹³ And it was not only concerning overt acts⁷¹⁴ that God, revealing Himself to them, wished to make His covenant with them but also concerning secret acts, as it is said: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God and the things that are revealed,” etc. (Deut. 29:28).⁷¹⁵ But they said to Him: Concerning overt acts we are ready to make a covenant with Thee, but we will not make a covenant with Thee in regard to secret acts lest one of us commit a sin secretly and the entire community be held responsible for it.⁷¹⁶

This midrash is attributed to “Rabbi,” i.e., Rabbi Judah the Patriarch, a Palestinian rabbi and leader from the turn of the third century CE, best known for redacting the Mishnah. According to Rabbi, Israel’s excellence or praise is made known through its conduct at Mount Sinai. Before receiving the Torah, all of the Israelites “made up their mind alike” or harmonized their minds, so that they could accept God’s sovereignty with joy/happiness.⁷¹⁷ Contextually, the surrounding passages of the text cited from Deut

⁷¹² *Yalqut Shimoni* has משתעשעין (to be happy) instead of ממשכנין (to pledge).

⁷¹³ *Midrash Tanhuma*, the Horowitz-Rabin Edition, and *Midrash Hakhamim* add עצמן (themselves) after ממשכנין (they pledged). The Oxford and Munich manuscripts have זה על ידי זה (this one by means of this one), instead of זה על זה (this one to this one).

⁷¹⁴ Instead of ולא על הנגלות בלבד נגלה (and not only concerning overt acts), the Oxford manuscript has ולא של כך אלא שנגלה (and not about thus, but God revealed himself...). The Munich manuscript has ולא עוד אלא שנגלה (and not only this, but God revealed himself...). *Midrash Hakhamim* has ולא על כך אלא שנגלה (and not about thus, but God revealed himself...). *Yalqut Shimoni* has only כשנגלה (when God revealed himself...). In effect, there are two different traditions represented by the textual witnesses. Lauterbach’s represents one in which God wishes to make a covenant about both overt acts and secret acts. The variants to Lauterbach leave out overt acts, placing emphasis on God’s desire to make a covenant about secret acts.

“Overt acts” (הנגלות) can also be translated, “the things exposed to view,” i.e., things that people can perceive or witness. This contrasts with סתר, which are things done in secret, or hidden from view.

⁷¹⁵ The Horowitz-Rabin Edition moves the quote from Deut 29:28 to the end of the midrash.

⁷¹⁶ Instead of מתמשכן (be held responsible), the Oxford manuscript has נתפס (be seized or arrested). The Munich manuscript has מתמסכן (be mixed up [with the sin]). *Yalqut Shimoni* has מסתכן בו (endanger themselves with him). *Midrash Hakhamim*, *Efat Zedek*, and *Meir Esh Shalom* add at this point the quote from Deut 29:28, which appears earlier in the passage, and include לנו ולבנינו (to us and to our children) from the Deuteronomy quotation. Within the semantic range of מתמשכן is “to be seized.” See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Brooklyn: Judaica Press, 2004), 854. The verb מתמשכן is a hitpaal. The same verb is used again earlier in the midrash as a Piel (ממשכנין), or “they pledged themselves”). Lauterbach’s translation obscures this point.

⁷¹⁷ The generating force behind the harmonization of minds may be the second person singular “you/r” in Exod 20:2, along with the second person singular אֱלֹהֶיךָ (your God; see footnote 690). The generating force may also have been Exod 19:2, with a sudden switch from Israel setting out, entering the desert, and camping in it in the plural, to Israel dwelling before the mountain in the singular. However, neither of these possibilities are stated explicitly by the midrash. If the midrash does indeed have either in

29:29 also promote a sense of harmonization of minds. Deut 29:10-14 provides a dramatic image of all of Israel standing *together* before God: “the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water.”⁷¹⁸ Deut 29:14-15 then goes on to state, “I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before the Lord our God, but also with those who are not here with us today.” The all-encompassing nature of these verses—with those who are here and those who are not—lends itself to a vision of a unified Israel, where each person is bound to all others through an oath. Thus, when Rabbi quotes Deut 29:29 in his midrash, he likely was alluding to this larger context.⁷¹⁹ It is not fully clear whether the unification of minds was a prerequisite for receiving the Torah, or whether that was a decision made by Israel at the time. Rabbi’s opening sentence may indicate the latter, in which case Israel’s initiative is connected to Israel’s excellence.

The unification of the minds leads to every Israelite pledging him/herself to every other Israelite. Without the unification of minds, there is no pledging. It should also be noted that the unification was done first to receive God’s reign with joy, which implies that joy in God’s reign is the foundation of Israel’s unification and its pledge. What the pledge entails, however, is not stated explicitly.

Instead, Rabbi moves on to state that God’s original intent was that, with this

mind, then its supposition that Israel has a unity of minds does not suppress a plurality of voices in Israel, as Israel’s response is voiced in the plural in the midrash.

⁷¹⁸ The rabbis would have understood the aliens (גֵּרִים) as converts.

⁷¹⁹ The rabbis understood Exodus and Deuteronomy’s account of Sinai as *one account*, rather than two *different* perspectives on the same event.

pledge, the Israelites would be accountable for every sin committed by each member of the community, both those that are committed in public view *and* those that are hidden: “And it was not only concerning overt acts that God, revealing Himself to them, wished to make His covenant with them but also concerning secret acts.” The Israelites respond to God’s wish with the words of Deut 29:28(29): “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things* belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law.”⁷²⁰ The meaning of this quotation, according to Rabbi, is that Israel is willing to accept that it should be held collectively accountable for overt acts, but rejects that its members should have collective covenantal responsibility for each other’s secret transgressions. In other words, if a person sins in public, the community will have an obligation to enact justice, but if a person sins in secret, the community will not intervene. The reasoning may be that since no one in the community will have witnessed the sin, the community cannot respond justly; moreover, if an Israelite commits a sin in secret, and the rest of the community never finds out, the entire community will be held accountable. The arrangement proposed through this verse, then, leaves the sins done in secret to God: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God.*” God is in charge of

⁷²⁰ The midrash quotes only the first half of the verse (in italics); though, the entire verse is intended, and so is quoted here. Quoting only part of the verse, while intending the whole, is a standard practice in midrash, as shortening a verse saves space. The presumed audience should know the entire verse.

The context of Deut 29:28(29) is Moses speaking on behalf of God to Israel in the land of Moab, recalling for Israel all that the Lord had done, and articulating to Israel the nature of the covenant: that it is made with Israel now, and all future generations of Israel, and that it entails destruction—on the scale of Sodom and Gomorrah—and exile if the Israelites turn away from its terms. This serves as a witness for the future generations of Israel, as well as non-Israelites, of what happens when Israel strays from the covenant. It is at this point that v. 28(29) comes in. It is perhaps no coincidence that Rabbi chooses Deut 29:28(29), as it speaks so blatantly about punishment and exile, the situation the Jews face in Rabbi’s own time. Equally significant is the biblical text that follows Deut 29:28(29), a promise of restoration *if Israel repents*, a message, again, to Jews living in Rabbi’s own time.

discovering them and exacting judgment.⁷²¹

At the beginning of Rabbi's interpretation, we were given a clear sense of what makes known Israel's excellence: Israel's unified joy in accepting God's reign. By the end of the interpretation, we are given a specific example of what acceptance of that reign looks like. One might presuppose that acceptance of rulership implies total obedience, but Rabbi gives us a different understanding: acceptance of God's reign *with joy* includes negotiation—at least when it comes to setting the terms of the covenant. Interestingly, both the first and second midrashim center on the theme of negotiation. If the two midrashim are read in light of each other, the first midrash focuses on protection and provisions for the political⁷²² of Israel, while the second revolves around life within the political entity—the ways in which Israel should conduct itself. Together, they communicate that had Israel not spoken up, it would not have received God's concessions, and the demands of the covenant would have been much greater. It is Israel's willingness to speak up that makes it excellent.

⁷²¹ See b. Hagigah 16a. R. Joseph, following R. Isaac's teaching, states that a person who commits a sin in secret operates as if God is not present everywhere, when in actuality God dwells in all places, and thus knows all things. One cannot hide one's acts, for God will know of them, and act accordingly. See also b. Sanhedrin 43b. Here, the presumption is that Israel has corporate responsibility for each other's sins. R. Nehemiah argues that this does not include sins done in secret. However, overt acts Israel is corporately responsible for, and this took effect after Israel crossed the Jordan.

The textual variations in this section should also be noted (see footnotes 714-717). Several textual witnesses lack "and not only concerning overt acts." The Oxford manuscript, Munich manuscript, and *Yalqut Shimoni* also lack "but also" (*Midrash Hakhamim* has "also"), rendering the interpretation as, "God, revealing himself to them, wished to make His covenant with them concerning secret acts." The Oxford manuscript, *Yalqut Shimoni*, and *Midrash Hakhamim* also lack "'and the things that are revealed,' etc." from Deut 29:29. This shifts the meaning of the interpretation in that God only wants a covenant in which Israel is responsible for secret acts. One might presume that in this covenant, God will be responsible for the overt acts. Israel's counterproposal, then, is more severe in these textual witnesses: it denies God the one thing God wants, and asks for the opposite.

⁷²² The term מדינה in the first midrash is translated by Lauterbach as "city," but can also be translated as "state," as in a political entity. The latter fits well with the second midrash, which discusses the ways in which the state must enact justice.

4.3.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

In Rabbi's midrash, God initially proposes that Israel be responsible for sins done publicly *and* in secret. The inability to enact proper justice for secret sins, along with the gravity and scope of the community's responsibility, appear to be what motivates Israel to negotiate these terms of the covenant. Israel counters God's offer with a more limited responsibility: Israel will only be responsible for sins done in public. This negotiation with God is something that is not present in the Christian exegesis. Augustine conceives of the revelation of the Law as a singular act of God giving the Decalogue to Moses.⁷²³ Similarly, evangelical commentators understand Moses' role as a mediator, conveying God's offer and commandments to Israel, and Israel's acceptance to God.⁷²⁴ According to some evangelical commentators, Moses does at times attempt to persuade God. For example, commenting on Exod 19:23, Fretheim argues that Moses tries to convince God that Moses does not need to go down to warn the people not to come up Mount Sinai, since they had already been warned. Nevertheless, God has Moses go down anyway, in order to show Moses' total obedience to God.⁷²⁵ This is a far cry from Israel—as a *whole*—negotiating with God, and emerging successfully.

Rabbi's depiction of Israel as able to deny an offer and mark the limits of what it is willing to do provides a different way of thinking about one's relationship with God.⁷²⁶

⁷²³ *Spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26; 16,28.

⁷²⁴ E.g., see Enns, 386; Hamilton, 305; Dozeman, 427-428.

⁷²⁵ Fretheim, 219. See also Stuart, 432.

⁷²⁶ Intimations of this can be found in such biblical texts as Exod 15:22-26. Here, the Israelites complain in Marah that they do not have potable water, upon which God miraculously makes the water drinkable. God then strikes a deal with Israel, in which God promises to not inflict any of the plagues that Egypt received, so long as Israel follows God's commandments. Perhaps one of the strongest differences between Rabbi's comment and Exod 15:22-26 is that in Rabbi's understanding, Israel was able to negotiate the terms of the Sinai covenant.

Perhaps God was, and still is, willing to negotiate. If one were to entertain this paradigm, one could be provided with new ways of interpreting various biblical texts. For example, Exod 19:20-25 could be read as a *glimpse* into a dynamic negotiating process between God and Israel. God tells Moses to warn the people to not come up Mount Sinai (vv. 20-21); Moses tells God that the people already received the warning (v. 23); God relents, but warns Moses that he better be sure no one comes up (v. 24); Moses ends up deciding to warn the people again to be absolutely safe (v. 25).

To depict Israel as negotiating the covenant with God, Rabbi turns to Deut 29:10-15. This move carries with it a similarity to a canonical exegetical approach, in that both seek other biblical passages that can illuminate a given text. However, while canonical exegesis is more mindful of the historical period of each text, Rabbi takes Deut 29:10-15—which, according to Deuteronomy, occurs on the plains of Moab, before the Israelites enter the Land—and collapses it into the Sinai event, reading them as *one* story. This is a common midrashic method that will appear again in A.5 below.

Rabbi's argument that the community of Israel is responsible for sins done in public bears some similarity with several evangelical interpretations of the motive clause of Exod 20:5-6. In determining the reason for cross-generational punishment in the motive clause, Coggins, for example, argues that it exposes a more ancient understanding of the interconnectivity of people across generations.⁷²⁷ Enns states that the purpose of the motive clause is to show that one's actions affect the entire community.⁷²⁸ For Motyer, the motive clause speaks of "genetic inheritance," or what a father passes onto a

⁷²⁷ Coggins, 78-79.

⁷²⁸ Enns, 416-417.

son.⁷²⁹ Similar to Rabbi, each of these evangelical interpretations reflect on the communal nature of Israel, and the ways in which the people are bound to each other. However, the evangelical exegesis concentrates specifically on the unavoidable *consequences* of one's actions on the community. Rabbi exposes another angle, which is only latent in the evangelical commentaries: the *responsibility* the community has for responding justly to the sins of others. The idea that the community is responsible for responding to sins done in public may run counter to some readers. One might cite Matt 7:1-5, in which Jesus argues that one should remove the plank in one's own eye before removing the speck in another's. Here, Jesus might be taken to mean that one should be (solely) concerned with one's own sins, instead of casting judgment on others'. As important as this passage is, Rabbi's exegesis calls to mind another important text:

¹⁵"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."⁷³⁰

Here, Jesus argues that an individual has both the right and responsibility to seek restitution from another member of the church who has wronged that individual, and has recourse to the community, if that person refuses to repent.⁷³¹ Part of what Jesus conveys

⁷²⁹ Motyer, 217. See also Bailey, 220; Bruckner, 183; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 28, 42; Currid, 40; Hamilton, 329-334; J. Janzen 146-147; W. Janzen, 255-257; Mackay, 346; Motyer, 217; Pokrifka, 220; Roper, 326; Ryken, 531; Scarlata, 161-162; Wiersbe, 110.

⁷³⁰ Matt 18:15-20.

⁷³¹ See also Ezek 3:18-19.

in this text is that communal accountability is essential for a functioning community. While Jesus focuses on individuals being wronged, Rabbi extends this to all sins done in public. Rabbi's midrash underscores the reality that a thriving community relies on the rectification of *all* transgressions that can be dealt with justly, not just those that affect us individually. Perhaps the same mechanism Jesus teaches might be used for public sins of any kind.

4.4 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* A.3

I Am the Lord Thy God. Why is this said? For this reason. At the sea⁷³² He appeared to them as a mighty hero doing battle, as it is said: "The Lord is a man of war" (Ex. 15.3). At Sinai He appeared to them as an old man full of mercy. It is said: "And they saw the God of Israel," etc. (Ex. 24.10). And of the time after they had been redeemed what does it say? "And the like of the very heaven for clearness." (ibid.) Again it says:⁷³³ "I beheld till thrones were placed" (Dan. 7.9). And it also says: "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him," etc. (ibid., v. 10). Scripture, therefore, would not let the nations of the world have an excuse for saying that there are two Powers, but declares: "I am the Lord thy God." I am He who was in Egypt⁷³⁴ and I am He who was at the sea. I am He who was at Sinai.⁷³⁵ I am He who was in the past and I am He who will be in the future. I am He who is in this world and I am He who will be in the world to come, as it is said: "See now that I, even I, am He," etc. (Deut. 32.39). And it says: "Even to old age I am the same" (Isa. 46.4). And it says: "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts: I am the first, and I am the last" (ibid. 44.6). And it says: "Who hath wrought and

⁷³² The Munich manuscript has עליהן (before them [Israel]), instead of הים (at the sea).

⁷³³ *Midrash Hakhamim* alters the order of these phrases. According to our text, the line is as follows: וגו' וכשנגאלו מה הוא אומר וכעצם השמים לטהר ואומר what does it say? "And like the very heaven for clearness." (ibid.) Again it says). Instead, *Midrash Hakhamim*'s text contains the following: וכעצם השמים לטהר וכשנגאלים מהו אומר ("And like the very heaven for clearness." And of the time after they had been redeemed, what does it say?). *Midrash Hakhamim* may be in error.

⁷³⁴ The printed editions and the *Yalqut* manuscripts to the Pentateuch (Oxford 2637) lack אני במצרים (I was in Egypt). In its place, *Yalqut Shimoni* has אני הוא במרה (I am he who was at Marah).

⁷³⁵ Instead of אני בסיני (I was at Sinai), the printed editions have אני על היבשה (I was on the shore/dry land).

done it? He that called the generations from the beginning. I, the Lord, who am the first,” etc. (ibid. 41.4). Rabbi Nathan says: From this one can cite a refutation of the heretics who say⁷³⁶: There are two Powers. For when the Holy One, blessed be He, stood up and exclaimed⁷³⁷: “I am the Lord thy God,” was there any one who stood up to protest against Him? If you should say that it was done in secret—but has it not been said: “I have not spoken in secret,” etc. (Isa. 45.19)? “I said not unto the seed of Jacob”⁷³⁸ (ibid.), that is, to these only will I give it. “They sought me in the desert” (ibid.). Did I not give it in broad daylight⁷³⁹? And thus it says: “I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right” (ibid.).⁷⁴⁰

This midrash has garnered significant attention from scholars, as it is usually identified as one of the key texts in the rabbinic description of and opposition to the “Two Powers.”

Scholars have debated over the identity of the Two Powers, the alleged polemical nature of the *Mekhilta* text, whether the text is motivated by polemics or exegetical gaps in the text, and whether the rabbis were specifically targeting Christians or Gnostics. In what follows, I will summarize the interpretations of three of the most significant voices in the debate (Alan Segal, Daniel Boyarin, and Adiel Schremer), and then offer my assessment of those interpretations.

According to Alan Segal, the “Two Powers” is a heresy, promoting a belief, based

⁷³⁶ The printed editions have שאומרים (who say), instead of שהיו אומרים (who used to say).

⁷³⁷ The Oxford manuscript lacks ואמר (for when the Holy One, blessed be he, stood up and said).

⁷³⁸ The Munich manuscript and the printed editions lack לא אמרתי לזרע יעקב (I said not unto the seed of Jacob; [translation is Lauterbach’s]).

⁷³⁹ The Munich manuscript has פנאס (torch, lantern), instead of פנגס (broad daylight or pledge). *Midrash Hakhmim* has פנייס (Paneas, a city to the north of Palestine), which Lauterbach believes is in error; he suggests that פנייס (in the presence of everyone) was meant. According to Jastrow, פנגס is a transposition of פפנוס, which means “pledge.” See Jastrow, 1186.

⁷⁴⁰ Alternatively, the section between “I have not spoken in secret” and “did I not give it in broad daylight” could be translated as: “I did not speak in secret [in a land of darkness (i.e., Egypt)].” “I only said to the Seed of Jacob”—to those to whom I am giving it [i.e., Torah]—“Seek me in chaos [i.e., the wilderness].” I did not give it in pledge.” In other words, God will not reveal the Torah in Egypt, thereby revealing/exposing it to the Egyptians. God will only reveal the Torah to Israel, and in order to ensure only Israel receives it, God tells Israel to go to the wilderness, which is an allusion to the commands God gave to Israel to worship God in the wilderness in Exod 3:18; 5:3; 8:27.

The Horowitz-Rabin Edition reads לא אמרתי להם—תוהו בקשוני, ולא נתתיה פנגס (to these I am giving it. But I did not say to them, “Seek me in the desert.” And I did not give it in pledge).

on Scripture, that alongside God exists a supernatural being that performs work in concert with God (called binitarianism) or against God (called dualism).⁷⁴¹ The heresy existed before the time of the rabbis or Christians in the form of binitarianism, and developed a dualistic strand in the second century CE. Several different sects and figures subscribed to one form or the other, including Philo, Christianity, and the Gnostics. The rabbis, however, vigorously opposed both. The rabbinic literature that references the Two Powers reveals that the tannaitic rabbis debated with Christians about the possibility of Two Powers. Many Christians developed a binitarian view of Jesus' relationship to the Father, and through debates with the rabbis, some took a more dualistic view, believing the God of the Old Testament to be the second, oppositional power. Overall, debates between Christians and rabbis over the Two Powers helped lead to the eventual split between the two traditions.

Daniel Boyarin offers a similar but more subtle theory.⁷⁴² The theology of "Two Powers" developed over a long period of time, and by the first century, became a *highly popular* doctrine among many, if not most, Jews. As rabbinic Judaism developed, the rabbis came to consider it a heresy, and used it, among other issues, to distinguish themselves from Christianity. This helped remove Christianity from being a movement within Judaism to being a separate tradition altogether, while simultaneously helping the rabbis mark their movement as distinct within Judaism. To be sure, the rabbis did not always have Christianity in mind when they spoke of the Two Powers. Rather, the rise of

⁷⁴¹ Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

⁷⁴² Daniel Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; or, The Making of a Heresy," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, eds. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Boston: Brill, 2004), 331-370. See also Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), especially pp. 128-147, which expands on the topic of modalism and the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity.

Christianity may have been one motivating factor in rabbinic impulses to target the doctrine and reject it. This means that there were other Jewish groups the rabbis had in mind who subscribed to the doctrine. Two Powers took on many forms, according to Boyarin, one of the most popular being Logos theology. This can be seen in many of the Targumim with the use of *Memra*—or the power which creates, reveals, and redeems. One of the main issues the rabbis had with Logos theology was that it conceived of an intermediary between God and humans, which the rabbis arduously rejected in favor of modalism (the belief that God manifests in different modes, instead of personas or hypostases). Modalism became the only acceptable doctrine for the rabbis, and they saw the doctrine of Two Powers as the primary heresy that must be rejected.

In contrast to Boyarin, Adiel Schremer rejects any theory that would frame the Two Powers controversy as a war between theological schools, with rabbinic Judaism on one side, and Christianity or Gnosticism on the other.⁷⁴³ Schremer sees such a move as a Christianization of rabbinic sources, an imposition of Christian categories that distorts the material. In addition, scholars heretofore have not distinguished between tannaitic and amoraic understandings of the Two Powers. This creates a problem, because it neglects the fact that the term itself is reinterpreted through various generations of rabbis. Schremer consequently only examines tannaitic understandings of the Two Powers. He believes the Two Powers was developed as a theodicy to explain the destruction of the Second Temple and the failed Bar Kokhbeh revolt. Schremer begins with an analysis of *Sifre Devarim* 328-329, arguing that these midrashim reflect a fear among at least some Jews that Rome's defeat of Israel could only mean that either God was killed, God lost

⁷⁴³ See Adiel Schremer, "Midrash, Theology, and History: Two Powers in Heaven Revisited," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008): 230-254.

God's power, or God was not as strong as other divine powers—and thus, there are Two Powers in heaven. *Sifre Devarim* refutes all of these beliefs, considering them dangerous to Judaism, *because they could lead to apostasy*. It refutes them with scriptural references, in order to prove that God is still the almighty. The point the *Mekhilta* wants to convey is the same point *Sifre Devarim* does, which is that acknowledgment of Two Powers is a direct refutation of God's power and abilities, a problem that does not stem from theological concerns, but a fear of apostasy as a response to the destruction of the Temple and the failed revolt. The Two Powers, then, may be in reference to God and the Roman Emperor, who was frequently seen as a god.⁷⁴⁴

As Segal, Boyarin, and Schremer argue, I believe our midrash is motivated to a significant degree by the *real* problem of Two Powers, a theological position the rabbis considered extremely dangerous. Our midrash opens by describing two apparently distinct powers—God as warrior (Exod 15:3) and God as merciful old man (Exod 24:10; Dan 7:9)—from which it builds an argument that names the Two Powers and attempts to refute it twice.⁷⁴⁵ Boyarin argues that our midrash finds problematic Dan 7:9-10 and the surrounding passages to which it alludes and assumes that the reader will know.

Dan 7:13ff describes both the Ancient of Days *and* the Son of Man. Juxtaposing this passage from Daniel with the distinct descriptions of God in Exod 15:3 and 24:10

⁷⁴⁴ On the topic of Two Powers, see also Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "Jewish-Christian Relations and Rabbinic Literature—Shifting Scholarly and Relational Paradigms: The Case of Two Powers," in *Interactions Between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art, and Literature*, eds. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner (Boston: Brill, 2009), 15-44; and Stephen Waers, "Monarchianism and Two Powers: Jewish and Christian Monotheism at the Beginning of the Third Century," *Vigilae Christianae* 70 (2016): 401-429.

⁷⁴⁵ In fact, the *Mekhilta*'s construction of the entire midrash into "two," as it were—two appearances of God, Two Powers, two people groups that might subscribe to Two Powers, and two arguments (the anonymous and R. Nathan's)—suggests that the Two Powers is not simply in service to a hermeneutical endeavor, but that it is a real concern that deserves a response. This is in contrast to Goshen-Gottstein's argument (see footnote 744).

potentially offers proof that there really are two powers, or that God is composed of two distinct persons. To prevent this possible interpretation, the midrash uses Exod 20:2 to prove that God is One, not Two.⁷⁴⁶

Like Boyarin, Schremer sees this passage as a typical “circular midrash,” characteristic of the midrashic methods of Rabbi Ishmael’s school. Schremer states that most interpreters believe that the midrash’s problem is located in the verse under examination. In our case, that would be Exod 20:2, a verse in which God’s name appears twice. According to these interpreters, the midrash solves the problem with the other verses that are cited (in our case, Exod 15:3; 24:10; Dan 7:9). In actuality circular midrash works in the reverse: the verse under examination is the solution to the verses that are cited. Moreover, Schremer says, the problem, according to the midrash, is not the appearance of God’s *name*, but God’s actual *appearance*. The fact that God appears in different ways could lend support to the nations’ belief that there are Two Powers.⁷⁴⁷ Schremer believes that the reason why the midrash cites Exod 24:10 as proof of God’s old age is that it assumes the reader will know the rest of the verse.⁷⁴⁸ When the text says “white sapphire,” the midrash imagines that the floor and God are both white, and thus God has the appearance of an old man. While Boyarin identifies Dan 7:9-10 as the chief text with which the midrash struggles, Schremer understands Dan 7:9-10 as part of the midrash’s proof that God is an old man: as Exod 24:10 depicts God as “white,” so too does Dan 7:9-10, when it describes the Ancient of Days as an old man, wearing “white.” The midrash, Schremer states, goes even further, seeing the scene in Daniel as actually

⁷⁴⁶ Boyarin, “Two Powers,” 342-347.

⁷⁴⁷ Schremer notes that the nations do not actually claim this from Scripture, but the midrash shows that the Scriptures could be misconstrued in this way (Schremer, “Midrash,” 244).

⁷⁴⁸ As stated above, this is a common function of midrash.

depicting the Sinai event; in both depictions, there is reference to a throne, fire, and the opening of books.⁷⁴⁹

The fact that Exod 24:10 and Dan 7:9 depict God as “white” justifies Schremer’s argument that Dan 7:9 supports Exod 24:10 in depicting God as an old man. However, the fact that Dan 7:13ff describes “two powers”—the Ancient of Days and the Son of Man—and the fact that this correlates well with Exod 15:3 (where God is a warrior), and Exod 24:10 (where God is an old man), supports Boyarin’s argument that the midrash has Dan 7:13ff in mind as the primary problematic verse. Which position is more accurate? It seems to me that the assumption of the midrash is that *all* of the verses that the midrash cites, including Exod 20:2, are problematic if they are understood independently of each other, or if only some of them are read together. It is only in the combination of *all* of these verses—Exod 15:3; 20:2; 24:10; Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 44:6; 46:4; Dan 7:9-10, 13—reading each in light of all of the others, that the correct interpretation can be found.⁷⁵⁰ In bringing these verses together, the midrash is able to argue that the One God can appear in many different ways: Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9), Son of Man (Dan 7:13),⁷⁵¹ warrior (Exod 15:3), old man (Exod 24:10)—and yet it is still the same God (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 44:6; 46:4). The midrash then closes with a comment by R. Nathan, which serves as

⁷⁴⁹ Schremer, “Midrash,” 239-248.

⁷⁵⁰ Here, I am building on the work of Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 26-38, 45, 80. Boyarin argues that for the *Mekhilta*, the criterion that governs the selection of texts in an interpretation is associations between the texts themselves. The midrashist’s choice is not constrained by one text or another, but guided by the ways in which certain texts are able to come together through certain associations and mutually interpret each other. The presupposition underlying this move is that a verse is poor in one context but rich in another (see y. Rosh HaShanah 3:5). In other words, biblical verses can be read in their own context, but their meaning will remain limited (and sometimes misunderstood) until they are read alongside other verses in other contexts. Boyarin calls this hermeneutical move “paradigmatic.” Verses are brought together through certain associations within the verses, and together, they represent or form a certain type or paradigm.

⁷⁵¹ Here, I follow Boyarin’s argument that the midrash presumes the reader will know that Daniel 7 discusses both the Ancient of Days and Son of Man.

a finishing touch: none of this is a secret that God has reserved for Israel. God has made all of this known to the entire world (Isa 45:19), when God declared at Sinai, “I am the Lord your God” (Exod 20:2).⁷⁵² In these words, God has told the world, *I and no other am your God*.⁷⁵³ At that time, no one protested. Thus, the nations truly have no excuse to claim that there are Two Powers.⁷⁵⁴

Who would say there are Two Powers? According to the midrash, two kinds of people would make this claim: the nations of the world and the “heretics” (מִיֵּינִין). One of Boyarin’s main arguments is that the “nations” referenced in this specific midrash is clearly Gentile Christianity. The midrash calls these Christians “nations” to distinguish them from Jews.⁷⁵⁵ However, I believe Schremer convincingly argues that this claim is unfounded. Schremer shows that when one studies closely the term “nations of the world” in the *Mekhilta* and other tannaitic work, it is clear Christianity is not the concern. Rather, the term usually refers to biblical nations, and sometimes to Rome (cf. *Shirta*

⁷⁵² Thus, I support Boyarin’s argument that the rabbis supported a modalistic view of God, that God has the capacity to appear in many different forms.

⁷⁵³ According to R. Nathan, the מִיֵּינִין can be refuted, because when God speaks Exod 20:2—“I am the Lord your God”—God did not say this to Israel alone, but proclaimed it to the universe, giving every power the opportunity to object that they actually are a Second Power. Since no power objected, it is clear that God is the sole power in the universe.

⁷⁵⁴ This interpretation is counter to Schremer’s, which argues that theology is not at issue when it comes to the Two Powers. I am convinced by Schremer that *Sifre Devarim* 328-329 is designed to combat apostasy, but I am not convinced of its connection to our midrash in the *Mekhilta*. Our midrash has none of the references to apostasy that *Sifre Devarim* does. In order to draw a connection between the two, Schremer argues that both texts use the term מָחָה (protest). In our midrash, R. Nathan argues that no one can protest that there is more than one Power. In *Sifre Devarim*, Titus challenges God by stating that if God is really *God*, then God should protest Titus’ claim that God is not (See Schremer, “Midrash,” 251-252). This could indicate a possible connection between the two midrashim, but the use of מָחָה alone is not enough evidence to make the argument absolute. Moreover, the subjects of the verb “protest” are different in each midrash: in *Sifre Devarim*, God is the subject of protest, while in our midrash, it is the nations of the world.

It may be that the *Mekhilta*’s midrash is a composite of three midrashim, each with its own concern: the first discusses God’s appearances in relation to Exod 20:2, and employs Exod 15:3; 24:10; Dan 7:9. The second constructs an argument against the nations of the world, using Deut 32:39; Isa 44:1, 6; 46:4. The third is R. Nathan’s argument, which relies on Isa 45:19 and deals with whether God ever explicitly rejected the belief in Two Powers.

⁷⁵⁵ Boyarin, “Two Powers,” 345-351.

10).⁷⁵⁶ As for “heretics,” Ruth Langer points out that the term מינין itself literally means “types” or “kinds.” A survey of rabbinic literature shows that its meaning varied over time and across diverse locations. Tannaitic and amoraic literature tend to identify מינין as Jews who do not follow rabbinic practices or beliefs. Such Jews could include Jewish-Christians,⁷⁵⁷ dualists, various groups that are difficult to categorize with specific titles, and possibly even Essenes. The point is that there is no standard definition for מינין, and the term continued to take on new meanings as Jews encountered new settings and situations.⁷⁵⁸ Taking Schremer and Langer’s insights into account, it appears our midrash identifies both an external and internal threat to rabbinic Judaism. The external threat, otherwise known as the “nations of the world,” may have had, according to rabbinic perceptions, a dualist or logocentric persuasion. The internal threat, or the מינין (“heretics”), existed within the Jewish community and may also have been influenced by dualism or Logos theology, and perhaps may even have included Jewish-Christians.⁷⁵⁹ Whoever they were, they did not align with rabbinic monotheism. Since there are no further identifiers within our midrash, we cannot gain more specificity. It is worth noting, though, that the lack of specificity does allow for flexibility: the midrash remains open to new understandings of external and internal groups that advocate Two Powers.

⁷⁵⁶ Schremer, “Midrash,” 248-251.

⁷⁵⁷ For evidence, Langer points to t. Hullin 2:24.

⁷⁵⁸ Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25-26.

⁷⁵⁹ Here, we should recall that one of the problematic texts our midrash cites is Daniel 7, in which reference is made to both the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9) and Son of Man (Dan 7:13). “Son of Man,” of course, in NT literature is a reference to Jesus (e.g., see Matt 24:30; Mk 14:62; Lk 21:27; Jn 8:28; Acts 7:56; Rev 14:14).

4.4.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Both the *Mekhilta* and the Christian commentators locate the theology and requirement of monotheism in the first commandment. However, while Augustine and the evangelical commentators consider Exod 20:3(-6) as the first commandment, the *Mekhilta* counts Exod 20:2. Interestingly, the evangelical commentators and the *Mekhilta* spend a significant amount of time arguing against a heretical theology in their exegesis of the first commandment: henotheism for the former, and the Two Powers for the latter. This may not be especially surprising for the evangelical exegesis, as Exod 20:3-6 specifically speaks of “other gods.” It is more surprising that the *Mekhilta* would do this, especially for an evangelical who presumes Exod 20:2 is a prologue that recounts God’s historical relationship with Israel.

Among the evangelical commentators, Stuart and Hamilton are some of the more forceful in denying Israel was ever henotheistic.⁷⁶⁰ Their effort to deny henotheism is similar to the *Mekhilta*’s effort to deny the Two Powers theology, in that all three embark on a quest throughout the Bible to bring various texts together to argue their point. Stuart takes a grammatical approach, attempting to determine all of the possible translations of עַל פְּנֵי.⁷⁶¹ Hamilton uses a canonical approach, examining what the rest of the Bible says about henotheism.⁷⁶² Meanwhile, the *Mekhilta* employs a paradigmatic exegetical method (see footnote 750). The paradigmatic method bears little resemblance to modern

⁷⁶⁰ Stuart, 448-449; Hamilton, 329.

⁷⁶¹ He examines the appearance of עַל פְּנֵי in Gen 49:30; Exod 20:20; Lev 9:24; Num 14:5; 16:22, 45; 20:6; Deut 6:7; 11:4; Isa 65:3; Jer 6:7; Nah 2:1.

⁷⁶² He examines e.g., Deut 4:35, 39; Isa 45:14, 18, 21-22; 46:9.

grammatical exegesis.⁷⁶³ The former brings what it sees as thematically relevant texts together to build an argument, while the latter seeks out all appearances of a certain word or phrase. However, the paradigmatic method does bear resemblance to the canonical approach: both bring different texts together from various contexts to build an argument about a particular topic. What distinguishes them might be that the latter is more constrained in its selection, gathering texts that are explicitly relevant to the topic at hand, while the former is more creative, drawing unexpected connections.⁷⁶⁴ However, this may be a bias on the part of a contemporary interpreter who does not read the biblical text the same way as the rabbis, and therefore would not readily see the same connections between texts.

Henotheism may seem like a distant issue for a modern Christian. What is not so distant is the issue of Two Powers. The argument between the rabbis and the מַיִינִין has a certain relevance for Christians. It can challenge a reader to think about the ways in which he/she articulates the trinity (and God's relation to human rulers). Interpretations, such as Augustine's, which argue that the first three commandments center on one member of the trinity each, can subtly lead one to presume there is more than one power in heaven. The rabbinic argument against the Two Powers, then, can aid in helping one maintain theological precision in one's exegesis. In addition, the rabbinic argument can instruct or remind a Christian that rabbinic monotheism is distinct from Christian monotheism: one is modalistic, while the other is trinitarian. That may seem like an

⁷⁶³ Development of grammatical exegesis became an interest among Jews from Arab influence during the early centuries of the second millennium in Spain. Jews felt a challenge to discern the rules of Hebrew grammar.

⁷⁶⁴ E.g., Hamilton selects Isa 45:14, because it specifically touches on the topic of monotheism. In contrast, Exod 15:3; 24:10; Dan 7:9, 13 do not have any obvious connection to Exod 20:2 on first look.

obvious point to some, but is sometimes forgotten in a quest to find common ground.

Likewise, the rabbinic argument can remind some that rabbinic theology of the unity and diversity of God is not absolutely different from Christian theology. In both of these cases, this midrash introduces a helpful pause. Rather than jump hastily to a conclusion that “we all worship the same God” or “we worship different gods,” one might first marvel at and appreciate rabbinic ways of describing a dynamic and relational God, who is both diverse and unified.

4.5 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* A.5

Another Interpretation: *I Am the Lord Thy God*. When the Holy One, blessed be He, stood up and said: “I am the Lord thy God,” the earth trembled,⁷⁶⁵ as it is said: “Lord, when Thou didst go forth out of Seir, when Thou didst march out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled⁷⁶⁶” (Judg. 5.4). And it goes on to say: “The mountains quaked at the presence of the Lord,” (ibid., v. 5). And it also says: “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty,” etc. (Ps. 29.4) up to: “And in his palace every one says: ‘Glory!’ ” (ibid., v. 9). And their houses even were filled with the splendor⁷⁶⁷ of the *Shekinah*.⁷⁶⁸ At that time all the kings⁷⁶⁹ of the nations of the world assembled and came to Balaam the son of Beor⁷⁷⁰. They said to him: Perhaps God is about to

⁷⁶⁵ The word translated as “tremble” (חלה) can also be translated as “to grieve” or “to be sick.”

⁷⁶⁶ The word translated as “trembled” (רעש) conveys the image of an earthquake.

⁷⁶⁷ “Splendor” (זיו) can also mean “radiance,” evoking the image of the *Shekhinah* (the indwelling presence of God) filling the houses with light.

⁷⁶⁸ The Hebrew text reads עד שנתמלאו בתיהם מזיו השכינה. Lauterbach translates this as, “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty,” etc. (Ps. 29.4) up to: “And in his palace every one says: ‘Glory!’ ” (ibid., v. 9). And their houses even were filled with the splendor of the *Shekinah*.” Lauterbach’s translation is admittedly confusing. What the midrash is saying is that the violent, stormy activity caused by God’s utterance of “I am the Lord thy God” is described in Psalm 29, from v. 4 up through (עד) v. 9. When the midrash states ... עד שנתמלאו בתיהם (“And their houses even were filled,” or more literally, “up to [i.e., until] their houses were filled...”), the midrash is explaining what the היכל (palace) is in Ps 29:9. Its answer is that היכל is the people’s houses, filled with the *Shekhinah* (God’s presence on earth). This experience causes the people to say, “Glory!”

⁷⁶⁹ Both the Oxford and Munich manuscripts lack מלכי (kings).

⁷⁷⁰ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition have הרשע (the evil one) instead of בן בעור (son of Beor). A parallel midrash in *Mekhilta*, *Amaleq* 3 also has הרשע.

destroy His world by a flood.⁷⁷¹ He said to them: Fools that ye are!⁷⁷² Long ago God swore to Noah⁷⁷³ that He would not bring a flood upon the world, as it is said: “For this is as the waters of Noah unto Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth” (Isa. 54.9). They then said to him: Perhaps He will not bring a flood of water, but He may bring a flood of fire. But he said to them: He is not going to bring a flood of water or a flood of fire. It is simply that the Holy One, blessed be He, is going to give the Torah to His people.⁷⁷⁴ For it is said: “The Lord will give strength unto His people,” etc.⁷⁷⁵ (Ps. 29.11). As soon as they heard this from him, they all turned back and went each to his place.

This midrash parallels closely A.4. In both, God utters, “I am the Lord your God” (Exod 20:2), causing seismic activity. As the mountains tremble in A.4, the earth does in A.5. The former cites Jer 46:18, as it envisions the mountains of Tabor and Carmel traveling to Sinai. Meanwhile, the latter turns to Judg 5:4-5 and Psalm 29. The Judges quotation comes from the Song of Deborah.⁷⁷⁶ In the context of Judges, the song apparently has nothing to do with the Sinai event. Indeed, Deborah’s story happens *after* Israel finally enters the land. Psalm 29 also apparently has nothing to do with Sinai.⁷⁷⁷ What connects Exod 20:2 with Judg 5:4-5 and Psalm 29 for our midrash is a fundamental rabbinic

⁷⁷¹ The Horowitz-Rabin Edition has שמא מבול מביא לעולם (Perhaps a flood is coming to the world), instead of שמא המקום מהריב עולמו במבול (Perhaps God is about to destroy his world by a flood).

⁷⁷² The Horowitz-Rabin Edition lacks שוטים שבעולם (Fools that ye are!, literally, “earthly fools!”)

⁷⁷³ The Horowitz-Rabin Edition lacks לנח (to Noah).

⁷⁷⁴ The Horowitz-Rabin Edition has הו"ה רוצה ליתן תורה לעמו (The Holy One, blessed be he, is intending to give Torah to his people), instead of הקב"ה נותן תורה לעמו ישראל (The Holy One, blessed be he, is giving Torah to his people, Israel).

⁷⁷⁵ The Munich manuscript and the printed editions lack the section that runs from אמרו לו שמא... (they said to him, “Perhaps...” to עוז לעמו יתן וגו' ([the Lord] will give strength to his people, etc.). Instead, they have וכו' (etc.), indicating a scribal omission. Corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg’s possession also lacks this section and has עד (etc. Until).

⁷⁷⁶ After the victory over Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army, Deborah and Barak sing a song that recounts the course of events that led to the victory. Contextually, the passage that the midrash quotes serves as part of the introduction to Deborah and Barak’s song. When the Lord comes from Seir and Edom, the earth trembles, and both the heavens and the clouds begin to send down rain. Edom was a transjordanian kingdom, located south of Moab. Seir is the name of the founding father of the Horites, a people group that was defeated by Edom. Seir is also the name of a mountain in Edom. Frequently, Seir is used as a synonym for Edom.

⁷⁷⁷ From a modern perspective concerned with the original meaning, the mention of “temple” (היכל) in Ps 29:9 may provide an indication that the timeframe of the psalm is during a period in which the Temple in Jerusalem stood—long after the Sinai event.

assumption about Scripture. In the words of James Kugel, the rabbis believed “each verse of the Bible is in principle as connected to its most distant fellow as to the one next door.”⁷⁷⁸ This means that each part of the Bible is, of course, related to its immediate context—but it also possesses an independence from that context, and is related in some way to every other part of the Bible. The work of the interpreter is to determine those relations.⁷⁷⁹ Thus, for our midrash, Exod 20:2 is as related to the rest of Exodus 20 as it is to Judg 5:4-5 and Psalm 29, and any other passage, for that matter. The way in which our midrash connects these three passages is through strong resemblances between the scenes depicted in each text: as the mountain shakes in Exod 19:18, so too mountains shake in Judg 5:5⁷⁸⁰; as thunder crashes over Sinai when God speaks (Exod 19:19),⁷⁸¹ so too there is thunder with God’s voice in Ps 29:3-9; as a storm rages during the Sinai event, so too a

⁷⁷⁸ Kugel, “Two Introductions,” 145. See also Boyarin, *Intertextuality*, 22-23, 25, 27-28. As Boyarin argues, rather than seeing the *Mekhilta*’s use of scriptural citations from other contexts, such as Judges or Psalms, as mere prooftexts that support a pre-formulated argument, it may be better to see them as “the generating force” that helps produce interpretations, the “intertexts and cotexts of the Torah’s narrative” (emphasis his). By juxtaposing biblical citations from various contexts, the midrashist ends up creating a “new discourse,” similar to how language itself works. This, for the rabbis, is the definition of interpretation. Boyarin observes that the placement of biblical texts into new contexts naturally leads to a “tension between the meaning(s) of the quoted text in its ‘original’ context and in its present context.” According to the *Mekhilta*, this does not violate Scripture, as the Written Torah itself is designed to allow this use; a new context, in fact, is “implied by the old one.” It should be noted also that when a midrashist uses a biblical quote from another context, the midrashist could also intend that original context to be in force. Thus, the midrashist can feel free to create a new context with a biblical citation or maintain the original one. So, when a modern interpreter encounters a text used *out of context* in a midrash, the assumption should not be that the midrashist was unaware of the original context. The overwhelming likelihood is that the midrashist was well aware of it, but was operating under different presumptions about the polysemy of biblical text.

⁷⁷⁹ Kugel, “Two Introductions,” 133.

⁷⁸⁰ The connection is made even stronger through Judg 5:5’s identification of the Lord as יְהוָה סִינַי (this one of Sinai) as well as יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל (the God of Israel). Another rabbinic assumption about Scripture that is operative here, though to a lesser extent, is a concept James Kugel calls “omnificance”: every detail of Scripture contains important meaning, even if the detail appears utterly insignificant. See Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible*, 17. In our case, the mention of Sinai in Judg 5:5, and also Seir and Edom in Judg 5:4-5, the “strength” in Ps 29:11, the shaking mountains in Exod 19:18 and Judg 5:5, and the thunder in Exod 19:19 and Ps 29:3-9—all have *tremendous* meaning, which our midrash explicates through bringing these passages together.

⁷⁸¹ Whether God’s voice is literally heard as thunder or bears similarities to thunder is an ambiguity in Exod 19:19, which our midrash’s interpretation will help provide clarity to. See below.

storm is in process in Judg 5:4-5, when God leaves Seir and Edom, and in Psalm 29, when God's voice travels over the waters and forests, and in Lebanon, Sirion, and Kadesh. In bringing Judg 5:4-5, Exod 19:16, and Psalm 29 together, our midrash collapses them into each other, reading them as describing a single event: the giving of Torah at Sinai. All three passages now mutually interpret each other.

After citing Ps 29:4, the midrash states that all of the kings of the world went to Balaam son of Beor, fearful that God was about to destroy the world with a flood. Balaam makes an appearance in Numbers 22-24 as a non-Israelite seer whose allegiance turns to God.⁷⁸² In the midrash, he takes on the same role. The entrance of the kings in our midrash may seem odd at first, but when we consider that the midrash is reading Judg 5:4-5, Psalm 29, and Exod 19:19 and 20:2 as describing the same event, their appearance makes sense: since various nations appear in Judg 5:4 and Psalm 29, they must also appear during the giving of Torah at Sinai.

With the various aspects of each biblical text now woven together, the midrash conceives of the Sinai event in the following way: God's encounter with Israel at Sinai causes violent, stormy activity, filled with thunder and earthquakes. This rouses the concern of the other nations, causing a panic, which leads the kings of the other nations to come to Balaam for answers. The kings first worry that God will destroy the world with a

⁷⁸² Balak, the king of Moab, hires Balaam to curse the Israelites, whom he fears will destroy Moab, as it did the Amorites. Balak believes that the curse will enable his army to defeat the Israelites. Balaam accepts the request and speaks with God, who tells Balaam to not curse the Israelites, because they are blessed. Balak sends a request to Balaam again, and again Balaam inquires God about the request. God tells Balaam to go with Balak's men to see Balak. However, interestingly, God becomes angry when Balaam saddles his donkey and heads out. So, God sends an angel to stop Balaam. Only the donkey sees the angel. The donkey stops in its tracks, and Balaam hits the donkey, urging it to continue. Finally, God opens the donkey's mouth, and it asks Balaam why he is treating it poorly. Then, Balaam's eyes are opened and he sees the angel. Balaam falls before the angel, who tells him to go with the men, but to say only what the angel commands. When Balaam meets Balak, Balaam proceeds to bless Israel.

flood,⁷⁸³ but Balaam assures them that God promised never to flood the world again, citing Isa 54:9 as his proof.⁷⁸⁴ Like good (rabbinic) legal experts, the kings observe that God only promised to not bring a flood of water; that does not mean God could not make a flood of fire.⁷⁸⁵ Balaam responds to the kings' fear by stating that God will not bring a flood of water or fire. The cause of the seismic activity is the giving of Torah to Israel. How is the midrash able to connect the stormy activity to the giving of Torah? The answer is Ps 29:11. In the biblical text, "The Lord will give strength unto His people," "strength" is thunder, i.e., God's voice. Our midrash, however, interprets this voice as Torah itself.⁷⁸⁶ Thus, the "strength," according to our midrash, is simultaneously the thunder, God's voice, and Torah itself. In this way, Psalm 29 is the glue that brings together Exod 20:2 and Judg 5:4-5. It transitions the scene from a terrifying display of natural phenomena to a dramatic act of revelation.

With this interpretation now established, it would be helpful to return to Exod 20:2. According to our midrash, when God declares, "I am the Lord your God" in Exod 20:2, the earth trembles and a storm commences, causing panic among the nations. Whether intentionally or not, our midrash's interpretation solves an ambiguity in Exod 19:19. God's speech is heard, according to Exod 19:19, as קוֹל ה'־יִעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל. The word קוֹל

⁷⁸³ Perhaps a reference to Ps 29:10.

⁷⁸⁴ Appropriately, Balaam, as a seer, quotes a prophecy instead of Gen 9:11, where God makes the initial promise to never flood the world again. In Isa 54:10, God states, "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed." The prophecy as a whole speaks of the restoration of Judah.

⁷⁸⁵ Fire is also mentioned during the revelation at Sinai. See Exod 19:18.

⁷⁸⁶ The identification of Torah with strength in Psalm 29 becomes a standard interpretation in later Jewish tradition. For example, the association appears in *The Targum of Psalms*, which is dated most likely some time between the fourth through sixth century. See David Stec, trans., *The Targum of Psalms: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 1-2. It appears again in *Midrash Tehillim*, which appears to have been slowly assembled between the third to thirteenth century. See Strack and Stemberger, 322-323.

in Exod 19:19 can be translated as either “voice/speech” or the sound of “thunder.” Exodus itself does not make absolutely clear which sense should be chosen (the NIV chooses the former, rendering God’s answer as a “voice”; the NRSV chooses the latter, translating God’s answer as “thunder”). Our midrash’s interpretation now offers a solution: while the world perceives the divine voice only as thunder, i.e., frightening noise (Psalm 29 and Judg 5:4-5), Israel experiences it as God giving God’s strength—i.e., Torah (Ps 29:11). In other words, the קול Israel hears is communicatory revelation, “I am the Lord your God.” It fills their houses with the *Shekhinah* (God’s presence), and causes the people to exclaim, “Glory!” (Ps 29:9; see footnote 768).

After Balaam speaks, the kings return back to their kingdoms. The reason for their return is not evident from the midrash. It may be that the kings were put to ease by Balaam’s explanation: even though the storm caused fright, the giving of the Torah to Israel, in their minds, should not cause concern and may even be beneficial to them.⁷⁸⁷ Alternatively, it may also be that if the giving of Torah causes such disruptive activity, then the kings want nothing to do with Torah, and so they return home.⁷⁸⁸ Either way, they leave Israel to its business, which ties the midrash in nicely with the ending of

⁷⁸⁷ *Sifre Devarim* 343 has a parallel midrash to the *Mekhilta*’s. In *Sifre Devarim*, when God gives the Torah to Israel, God shakes the world and all the inhabitants. At the end, after Balaam assures the nations that God is giving Torah to his people, the nations quote Ps 29:11, which indicates that God will give Israel peace. This suggests that when Israel is at peace, so too God will be, and so too the world will be, for God’s shaking of the world will end. See *Mekhilta*, *Bahodesh* 1 for a parallel to *Sifre Devarim* 343. See also *Pesiḳta Rabbati* 21:4 and b. Zevahim 116a. In *Pesiḳta Rabbati*, R. Hiyya bar R. Abba states that the world fears that Israel might not accept the Torah; if Israel does not, the world will be submerged by water, as it was at the beginning. Similarly, R. Huna, in the name of R. Aha, states that Israel’s acceptance of the Torah prevents the world from succumbing to destruction. In b. Zevahim 116a, Balaam tells the nations that the Torah is a treasure that God hid nine hundred and seventy-four generations before the creation of the world, and that all this time, he has desired to give it to Israel, his children. After this, Balaam states that the Torah is strength to his people, and the kings reply that God will give God’s people peace (Ps 29:11).

⁷⁸⁸ Could it also be that the kings are disappointed that the Torah is given to Israel and not to any other nation? Read in light of A.6 (below), one might come to this conclusion.

Ps 29:11: “May the Lord bless his people with peace!”

4.5.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

As mentioned in the comparison section of A.2 above, the rabbinic method of bringing together various texts to facilitate the interpretation of a particular text bears resemblances to a canonical approach, which also seeks out other biblical passages from diverse contexts. The difference, I believe, lies in the way the biblical passages are employed. If one were to think of an interpretation like a house, a canonical approach would assemble each relevant passage into walls that hold the home together. Each passage supports the others, and together, they help one understand a particular passage/issue. For example, a canonical approach might turn to Job 40:5, in which God speaks to Job from a storm, and perhaps Psalm 29, to help discern the significance of the presence of a storm during a revelatory moment. In contrast, the rabbinic approach would take each passage, or wall of the house, and collapse them into each other. In this way, rather than holding each other up, Judg 5:4-5 and Psalm 29 with Exod 20:2 become the same story.

For the *Mekhilta*, the end result of collapsing Judg 5:4-5, Psalm 29, and Exod 20:2 into each other is that the giving of Torah to Israel begins with a storm, but eventually leads to peace. The kings of the nations of the world, upon realizing what is happening, return to their place. The implication seems to be that Israel’s continued fidelity to the Torah will maintain peace, not only for Israel, but the world. Such a view has strong resonances with certain evangelical interpretations. For example, failure to follow the Law, according to Scarlata, will introduce chaos and destruction in both Israel

and the world.⁷⁸⁹ In addition, Stuart argues that successful observance of the Law ensures that Israel will be God's treasured possession (distinct from the other nations), a kingdom of priests (God's mediators on earth), and a holy nation (a positive influential presence among the other nations).⁷⁹⁰ Fidelity to the Law, Fretheim adds, is not done simply for Israel's own benefit (though, there *are* benefits, such as a successful life in the Land), but is also for the sake of the world.⁷⁹¹

Not all of the interpretations, however, are this sanguine. Augustine, for example, argues that Jews have limited themselves in their literal observance of the Law, failing to grasp its spiritual meaning and practice.⁷⁹² Only a minority throughout history have been able to successfully practice the Law, and those who do, practice it out of fear, instead of love.⁷⁹³ If the Jews show any beneficial example, it is the hardship and subjugation that results from rejecting Christ.⁷⁹⁴ Views such as Augustine's exist even today; however, most of them are far more sensitive in their evaluation of Israel. Enns, for example, argues that Israel continually failed throughout the OT, which led to the coming of Christ and the birth of the church, through whom God would realize God's original goal in making Israel a treasured possession, kingdom of priests, and holy nation.⁷⁹⁵ It should be noted, though, that unlike Augustine, Enns does not make any evaluation of Judaism in the present.

Much has been written about positive reevaluations of Judaism.⁷⁹⁶ Rather than

⁷⁸⁹ Scarlata, 147-148, 153-155.

⁷⁹⁰ Stuart, 44-45, 422-424.

⁷⁹¹ Fretheim, 21-22, 210-214.

⁷⁹² *En. Ps* 74.12

⁷⁹³ *S.* 9.6-8.

⁷⁹⁴ *C. Faust* 12.9-13

⁷⁹⁵ Enns, 396-399.

⁷⁹⁶ E.g., see Boys, *Has God Only One Blessing?*; Mary Boys, *Redeeming Our Sacred Stories: The Death of Jesus and Relations Between Jews and Christians* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2013); Philip A.

rehashing the conversation, I would like to raise a question inspired by the midrash. According to the *Mekhilta*, the nations of the world perceive God's revelation as a storm, while Israel experiences it as God's voice. For those Christians who believe the church and Israel today are distinct entities in salvific relationships with God, how should the church perceive the revelation at Sinai? If the church is not Jewish, but does claim Torah as an inheritance, where is the church's "place"? One might say the church is caught in the middle, between the nations and Israel. In light of that, should the church hear the Torah as both thunder and voice? Should it at once be terrified and strengthened? Should it treat the Torah as both foreign and intimate?

4.6 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* A.6

And it was for the following reason that the nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah: In order that they should have no excuse for saying⁷⁹⁷: Had we been asked we would have accepted it. For, behold, they were asked and they refused to accept it, for it is said: "And he said: 'The Lord came from Sinai,'" etc. (Deut. 33.2). He appeared to the children of Esau the wicked and said to them: Will you accept the Torah?⁷⁹⁸ They said to Him: What is written in it? He said to them: "Thou shalt not murder" (ibid. 5.17). They then said to Him: The very heritage⁷⁹⁹

Cunningham, Joseph Sievers, Mary C. Boys, Hans Hermann Henrix, and Jesper Svartvik, eds., *Christ Jesus and the Jewish People Today: New Explorations of Theological Interrelationship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011); Marianne Moyaert and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., *Never Revoked: Nostra Aetate as Ongoing Challenge for Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010); Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson, and A. James Rudin, eds., *Evangelicals and Jews in Conversation on Scripture, Theology, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

⁷⁹⁷ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition have כלפי שכניה לומר (to say against the *Shekhinah*) instead of just לומר (to say).

⁷⁹⁸ The Hebrew text is מקבלים אתם עליכם את התורה (will you accept the Torah), which could convey a variety of tones, such as appeal, demand, desperation, exacerbation, etc. At the beginning of the interpretation, the nations are נתבעו, which can mean "asked" and also "appealed to." The sense seems to be that God is earnestly seeking acceptance of the Torah.

⁷⁹⁹ "Heritage" (ירושה) can also mean "inheritance" or "heirloom." The word ירושה also has an interesting assonance with ירושלים (Jerusalem), especially to an aggadic ear.

which our father⁸⁰⁰ left us was: “And by thy sword shalt thou live” (Gen. 27.40). He then appeared to the children of Amon and Moab. He said to them: Will you accept the Torah? They said to Him: What is written in it? He said to them: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Deut. 5.17). They, however, said to Him that they were all of them children of adulterers,⁸⁰¹ as it is said: “Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father⁸⁰²” (Gen. 19.36). Then He appeared to the children of Ishmael. He said to them: Will you accept the Torah? They said to Him: What is written in it? He said to them: “Thou shalt not steal” (Deut. 5.17). They then said to Him: The very blessing that had been pronounced upon our father was⁸⁰³: “And he shall be as a wild ass of a man: his hand shall be upon everything⁸⁰⁴” (Gen. 16.12). And it is written: “For, indeed, I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews” (ibid. 40.15). But when He came to the Israelites and: “At His right hand was a fiery law⁸⁰⁵ unto them” (Deut. 33.2), they all opened their mouths and said: “All that the Lord hath spoken will we do and obey” (Ex. 24.7). And thus it says: “He stood and measured the earth; He beheld and drove asunder the nations⁸⁰⁶” (Hab. 3.6).

The midrash opens with the following: the nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah, “in order that they should have no excuse (פתחון פה, better translated as “no opening”) for saying: Had we been asked we would have accepted it.” The way the

⁸⁰⁰ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition include שנאמר (as it is written) after אבינו (our father), rendering the text, “This is the heritage that our father left to us, as it is written....”

⁸⁰¹ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition have כלנו מניאוף דכתיב (all of us [come from] adultery, as it is written) instead of שנאמר הן מנאפין הן (all of them were children of adulterers; thus it is written).

⁸⁰² The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition add והיאך נקבלה (so how will we accept it [Torah]?) to מאביהן (their father).

⁸⁰³ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition have בזו הברכה נתברך אבינו דכתיב (with this blessing our father was blessed, as it is written) instead of זו היא ברכה שנאמרה לאבינו (this is a blessing that was pronounced upon our father). *Yalqut Shimoni* has זו ברכה שנתן לנו אבינו שנאמר (this is a blessing that our father gave to us, as it is written). A *Yalqut* manuscript to the Pentateuch (Oxford 2637) has זהו שנאמר בהם זו ברכה שנאמרה בהן (this is a blessing that was pronounced to him). *Midrash Hakhhamim* has זהו שנאמר בהם (this is what was written to/about them).

⁸⁰⁴ The midrash reads בכל as “on everything,” while translations such as the NRSV read it as “against everyone.” The NRSV is taking the context of Gen 16:12 into account when translating the preposition ב. More frequently, the preposition means “in,” “with,” or “on.”

⁸⁰⁵ In the Lauterbach and the Horowitz-Rabin editions, the word is אש דת, translated as “fiery law.” This is the typical way the word is understood in rabbinic texts. In the MT, it appears as אשדת with a qere/ketiv.

⁸⁰⁶ Lauterbach believes גיים ויתר, which the Authorized Version translates as “drove asunder” might be more appropriately understood as “abandoned.” For the midrash, the sense, according to Lauterbach seems to be that after the nations reject God’s offer, God “gave up hope of their accepting the Torah” (see Lauterbach, 317, n. 10).

midrash is set up with the phrase “no opening” indicates that it is dealing with the issue of Israel’s chosenness, and a complaint—real or imagined—that God has formed a special relationship with Israel to the exclusion of all other nations. The midrash’s response to this complaint is that each nation had an opportunity to accept the Torah, but refused. Thus, God’s selection of Israel is completely fair. By the end of the midrash, however, one may be left with the impression that God’s offer was calculated and perfunctory, merely offering the Torah to the other nations preemptively so that they would not have any excuse. Indeed, the entire interpretation can give the impression that Israel is (inherently) superior to all other nations, as it alone possessed the willingness (or ability) to receive the Torah. To determine whether these impressions are accurate, and to discern whether there are other dynamics present, it will be helpful to examine the midrash closely.

The midrash turns to Deut 33:2 as the scene in which God makes God’s offer. The text comes from Moses’ final blessing to Israel.⁸⁰⁷ The midrash quotes the first part of the verse, but intends the entirety, which states, “The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shown forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a אשדת.”⁸⁰⁸ What the midrash is doing with Deut 33:2 is using it to establish that God left Sinai and went to other nations to offer the Torah to them first.⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁷ In Deuteronomy 33, Moses offers a final blessing to each tribe, similar to the patriarchs, especially Jacob, before their deaths. The verse the midrash quotes is the opening to the entire blessing. The address is to a new generation of Israelites who are about to enter the land.

⁸⁰⁸ However, אשדת has been intentionally left untranslated.

⁸⁰⁹ The choice of going to the children of Esau and Ishmael now becomes clear. Seir is a synonym for Edom, as mentioned earlier. The desert of Paran is where Ishmael was born and where he and his mother resided after they were sent away by Abraham. The one mystery in the midrash’s selection of nations is Moab and Amon. This may be resolved, however, when one considers the fact that Moses gives the Deuteronomy 33 blessing in Moab (see Deut 34:1). Thus, Moab and Amon are implied by the location of Deut 33:2. Interestingly, the language God uses when asking the children of Amon and Moab to accept the Torah is slightly different than Esau and Ishmael. With Amon and Moab, the word עליכם (upon you) is

At his right hand is a אשדת. The NRSV translates אשדת as “host of his own,” but admits that the Hebrew is uncertain. The typical way the word is read in rabbinic texts, including our midrash, is אש דת (“fiery law,” i.e., Torah).⁸¹⁰ In this understanding, God leaves Sinai with Torah in his right hand, ready to offer it.

God appears first to the children of Esau, then Amon and Moab, and finally Ishmael. Each time when God asks if they will accept the Torah, the nations ask what is written in it. God quotes a portion of Torah (from the Decalogue), and each nation denies God’s offer by, interestingly enough, quoting Torah. For Esau’s descendants, God quotes Exod 20:13, “You shall not murder.” Esau’s descendants reply with Gen 27:40, “By your sword you shall live.” This is the inheritance they were given from their father, Isaac. For Moab and Amon’s descendants, God quotes Exod 20:14, “You shall not commit adultery.” The descendants of Moab and Amon reply with Gen 19:36, “Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.” Moab and Amon are the children of this adulterous incest.⁸¹¹ One might infer from this that the descendants of Moab and Amon have carried on this tradition ever since.⁸¹² For Ishmael’s descendants, God quotes

left out. Alternatively, the phrase וְאִתּוֹ מֵרֵבֶת קֹדֶשׁ (“with him were myriads of holy ones”) has alternate ancient translations. For example, the LXX has σὺν μυριάσιν Καδης (with the myriads of Kadesh). See Jack Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 922. If the midrash moves in a similar direction, Kadesh *may* have been what the midrash had in mind as a location for Moab and Amon.

On a separate note, the order of the nations—Esau, Amon and Moab, and Ishmael—seems to be governed by the order of the Decalogue itself: Exod 20:13 deals with murder, v. 14 with adultery, and v. 15 with stealing.

⁸¹⁰ See footnote 805. The reference to Seir and the whole action sequence of God coming from abroad connects the verse nicely to Judg 5:4-5 and midrash A.5 above.

⁸¹¹ Lauterbach notes that technically, according to Genesis, Lot’s daughters are not adulterers, since they are not married. Lauterbach believes that the *Mekhilta* may have in mind a tradition, as represented in *Bereshit Rabbah* 50, of Lot’s daughters as engaged to be married. Intercourse with anyone besides the fiancée is considered adultery in Jewish law. Whether or not they were adulterers, they were certainly guilty of incest. The rabbinic category of גילוי עריות covers all forbidden relationships.

⁸¹² This is hinted at in the manuscripts, and is made more explicit in the printed editions (see footnotes 801-802). It should be noted that printed editions have a tendency to include glosses to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the text. Perhaps lurking in the background is Deut 23:1-6.

Exod 20:15, “You shall not steal.” The descendants of Ishmael reply with the messenger of God’s prophecy about Ishmael before his birth in Gen 16:12: “He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand [upon] everything.” The descendants of Ishmael then state that this is indeed their nature, citing Joseph in Gen 40:15, “For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews.” Joseph’s brothers sold him to Ishmaelites who brought him to Egypt and sold him again there (Gen 37:28, 36).⁸¹³

The conclusion one is to gather from this sequence is that each of these nations has a way of life that is contradictory to Torah.⁸¹⁴ When God offers them Torah, they decline, opting for the tradition they have received, or the lifestyle they have known. This allows God, without objection, to “drive asunder the nations”⁸¹⁵ (Hab 3:6); meaning, since each nation rejected God’s offer on its own volition, none of them can charge God for being unfair in forming a special relationship with Israel. Seen in this way, the midrash can instill confidence in the legitimacy of Israel’s chosenness. Moreover it can offer empowerment, as Israel *emerges* superior to the other nations, partly because it alone was willing to accept the Torah, and partly because it alone now possesses the blessing of Torah.

The rote sequence of events, however, as indicated above, can truly give the distinct impression that God’s offer was disingenuous. The entire event can seem

⁸¹³ The Hebrew text for Joseph’s speech reads כי גנב גנבתי. The first is a Pual infinitive absolute, and the second is a first person Pual singular perfect. A modern reader would understand the infinitive absolute as adding emphasis. Hence, the translation “in fact I was stolen.” However, it seems that the typical of rabbinic exegesis, the midrash reads each occurrence of גנב as a reference to the two times the Ishmaelites sell Joseph (Gen 37:28, 36, respectively). There does seem to be confusion in the Genesis text whether Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites or Midianites. In Gen 37:28, Midianite traders pass by, but Joseph is sold to Ishmaelites. However, in Gen 37:36, the Midianites sell Joseph to Potiphar in Egypt. Nevertheless, in Gen 39:1, it is the Ishmaelites who sell Joseph to Potiphar.

⁸¹⁴ It is curious that Egypt and Canaan, nations that may have seemed obvious choices, do not receive mention in this midrash.

⁸¹⁵ See footnote 806.

contrived, overshadowed by the line, “And it was for the following reason that the nations of the world were asked to accept the Torah: In order that they should have no opening.” It may seem God’s intention was singular—to avoid any accusation that God is unfair. God neither wanted nor expected any other nation beyond Israel to accept the Torah.

However, there is another approach to the midrash that is worth consideration: Israel is not the first nation to which God appears. Considering Israel’s current state—a band of ex-slaves who just escaped their captors—the other established nations present themselves as far more attractive and capable of observing Torah. This may be why God turns to them first. When God finally does come to Israel, something different occurs: they see God’s law on fire, and they speak together, “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient” (Exod 24:7).

Israel’s declaration of acceptance appears in two other places: Exod 19:8 and 24:3, each with a slight variation.⁸¹⁶ Technically, in Exod 24:7, Israel declares its acceptance during the covenant ratification ceremony, which occurs *after* God reveals the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant. However, from a midrashic understanding, the verse can and does occur earlier, at the moment God *offers* Israel the Torah. The NRSV does not quite capture how the midrash understands the verse. The NRSV translates וְנִשְׁמָע as “and be obedient.” If translated more literally, the term means, “we will hear.” This would render the translation of Exod 24:7 as “All that the Lord has said we will do, and we will hear.” In other words, Israel is willing to accept the Torah before ever hearing what is in it—the complete opposite of the other nations, which ask first what is in the

⁸¹⁶ Exod 19:8 reads וְנִשְׁמָע לְאִשְׁרָאֵל; Exod 24:3 reads וְנִשְׁמָע לְאִשְׁרָאֵל; and Exod 24:7 reads וְנִשְׁמָע לְאִשְׁרָאֵל.

Torah, and then subsequently reject it.

The question is why Israel proceeds in this way. One possibility might be that Israel's eager acceptance of the Torah may have been spurred by its desperation as ex-slaves wandering the wilderness. In such a dejected state, they would have accepted anything. The fiery nature of Torah may offer further insight. Notably, the midrash does not state that the other nations see the Torah as fiery. It seems the Torah turns ablaze only when Israel becomes the last nation to receive God's offer. Having no other option, God perhaps chooses to compel Israel to accept the Torah by setting it on fire. Thus, Israel accepts the Torah out of dread. Conversely, Israel's perception of the law as fiery may lead it to conclude before receiving it that the Torah will be beneficial.⁸¹⁷ Then again, it may be an inherent or impulsive drive within Israel to do the exact opposite of the other nations that leads it to accept the Torah without knowing what is in it.⁸¹⁸ Either way, one is left to wonder whether Israel would have also rejected the Torah if it knew what it contained.

So, while God's offer may in fact be calculated and Israel's status may be superior, it remains true that Israel was not offered the Torah first and that it did not know

⁸¹⁷ *Sifre Devarim* 343 goes in this direction, stating specifically what it means for Torah to be a fiery law: both fire and Torah are given from heaven; both will endure eternally; both can give warmth and life if one comes near; both are used in this world and the world to come; both mark the body of the person who uses it as distinct.

⁸¹⁸ The midrash also appears in *Sifre Devarim* 343. Here, after the Ishmaelites reject the Torah, the midrash states that God goes to every other nation in a similar way, and each of them rejects the Torah. The midrash quotes Ps 138:4 as indicating this, and makes special note that Ps 138:4 does not indicate that the nations accepted the Torah; it must be read in light of Mic 5:14, which clearly expresses that the nations receive God's vengeance, because they have rejected the Torah. Moreover, they are unable to keep the Seven Noahide Laws, which has forced God to give all of the laws, including the Seven Noahide Laws to Israel. The Seven Noahide Laws are the commandments that God gave to Noah and his descendants after leaving the ark (cf. Genesis 9). They encompass prohibitions on idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, theft, and eating a live animal's limb; and a command to establish courts of law. While *Sifre Devarim* combines the midrash on God's offer of Torah to the nations and the Seven Noahide Laws into a unified message, the *Mekhilta* separates them into two midrashim. Thus, the implication of the seventh midrash in the *Mekhilta* need not be read into the sixth midrash.

what it was accepting. Seen in this way, it is quite possible that Israel was God's last resort and that Israel merely accepted the Torah out of fear or compulsion.⁸¹⁹ Each one of these interpretations can be gleaned from the midrash. If considered together, they provide a complex picture of Israel's election, a picture that is simultaneously a source of pride and humility.

4.6.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

A midrash such as this can easily be off-putting, especially to those who seek positive relations between Jews and Christians. On first read, one might perceive the midrash as arrogant and triumphalist, proving to the world why one group of people is superior to all others. One might wonder if a text like this should ever be disseminated, lest it perpetuate destructive habits of exclusivity, like the age-old motif of Jacob's conflict with Esau, with Jews and Christians alike claiming the other is the older twin, bereft of Jacob's greater blessing.⁸²⁰

I would like to argue that this text can actually be useful and instructive for Christians. I should start by noting the obvious. Christian literature is replete with apologetic texts that claim the superiority of Christianity. Augustine's understandings about the Church's ascendancy over the Jews were noted in A.5 above. One might add to that discussion that Augustine believed that after the Jews rejected Jesus as the messiah,

⁸¹⁹ This fits well with the message of Deut 7:6-7, that God did not choose Israel because it was the largest, but because it was the smallest.

⁸²⁰ See Alan Segal, *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in The Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); and Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

the church became the new Israel, and is now the bearer of God's election and mission throughout the world.⁸²¹ Also noted above in A.5, evangelical commentators, like Enns, have continued Augustine's belief that the church is now the new Israel, charged to be God's priests and holy nation, and continue God's mission in the world. It is important, though, to underscore that the invective found in Augustine's writings is no longer present in contemporary evangelical texts. References to Jews in the present are indirect, if they appear at all.⁸²²

For someone who has heard exclusively or primarily the apologetics of one's own community, it can be helpful to hear the apologetics of another. Doing this can disturb and even destabilize one's preconceptions about one's own community and the other, opening a person up to new insights in ways that may not have been accessible previously. This, of course, requires a willingness to listen intently and consider carefully what the other has to say. What will eventually happen as a result, however, cannot be predetermined. I can only speak for myself. In my case, I was initially shocked by this midrash, and the way it characterized the other nations. I had not encountered Jewish apologetics before, and to read one disturbed me. A range of responses came to mind: I wanted to refute it, I wanted to bury it, I wanted to consider its merit, I wanted to allow it to disabuse me of my own sense of chosenness.

After dwelling with the text for some time, I came to the decision that I could

⁸²¹ See especially *civ. Dei* 20.20 and s. 196.3. For an overview of Augustine's view of Judaism and extensive bibliography on the topic, see Michael Signer, "Jews and Judaism," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 470-474; and Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

⁸²² Enns, 396-399. See also Bailey, 219; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 15; Coggins, 72-73; Currid, 19; Fretheim, 210-214; Harman, 203; Pokrifka, 208-209; Roper, 315, 317; Ryken, 461; Wendland, 11; Wiersbe, 104-105

move in one of two directions. The first was to refute the midrash's claim to election, and reassert my own sense of chosenness. The second was to consider the order of events in the midrash: Israel is the last to be offered Torah, and Israel either out of fear, compulsion, or perhaps faith, accepted the Torah without reviewing its contents. That sense of humility reminded me that humility is at the heart of Christian virtue, and inspired me to search for something equivalent in my own tradition. I came to Rom 9:4-5, where an impassioned Paul states, "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah." I had read this text many times before as an argument that Israel is still in a salvific relationship with God, but suddenly I was now noticing something I had not before: just as God did not go to Israel first, Christ did not go to gentiles first. God formed a special bond with Israel long before ever sending Christ, and when God did, Christ first dwelled with Israel.⁸²³ Such a conclusion unnerves my evangelical belief that each person is special, unique, God's first. But simultaneously, such a conclusion puts me in a similar place that the *Mekhilta* does: that I am not the first chosen, and this fact can be a useful source of humility. The *Mekhilta* also has me doing something else; it has me wondering if my evangelical belief that each person is special, unique, God's first could ever be true if what I lose in the process is a sense of humility.

⁸²³ See Matt 15:24. One might extend this line of thinking further and argue that God dealt with nations and perhaps even formed covenants with some of them long before Israel came on scene. Perhaps there is an original nation that God chose to form a covenant with, which we have no knowledge of. Perhaps this too might be a source of humility. We know not who was chosen first. The point, however, is not to discover who was first chosen, but to come to terms with the reality that we were not.

4.7 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* A.10

10. To three things the Torah is likened⁸²⁴: To the desert, to fire, and to water. This is to tell you that just as these three things are free to all who come into the world, so also are the words of the Torah free to all who come into the world.

This midrash comes at the end of a sequence of midrashim that center on the theme of Israel as the sole recipient of Torah. The fourth and fifth midrashim state that the world shakes and trembles, leading the mountains of Tabor and Carmel in the fourth interpretation to realize Israel alone is to receive Torah, and the nations of the world in the fifth interpretation to be at ease upon the same realization. In the sixth midrash, God specifically offers the Torah to each nation, only to be turned down, until Israel hears the Torah. In the seventh interpretation, R. Simon b. Eleazar reasons that since the nations cannot uphold the Noahide Laws,⁸²⁵ there is no reason to believe they will observe all of the laws of Torah. The eighth and ninth midrashim consider the location of where Torah was given: out in the wilderness. The eighth midrash states that it was given in the wilderness, so that the nations would not have an excuse to say they could not accept it, since it was given in the land of Israel, while the ninth midrash states it was not given in Israel, so that the tribes of Israel could not claim it was given in their land, so it belongs to them alone.

At the end of this sequence comes the tenth midrash, which likens the Torah to the wilderness, fire, and water, in that, as all people have free access to the wilderness,

⁸²⁴ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin Edition have נתנה (“is given” [translated as a Niphal perfect], or less likely “gave” [translated as Qal perfect]), instead of נמשלה (compared/likened). Grammatically, the ב בשלשה (with three) works better with נתנה (is given). If the word is נתנה, the meaning of the text is that desert, fire, and water were given with Torah. In other words, these three form the context in which the Torah is given.

⁸²⁵ For a definition of the Noahide Laws, see footnote 818.

fire, and water, so too all people have free access to the words of Torah.⁸²⁶ One might understand this midrash in at least one of two ways.⁸²⁷ In the first way, the midrash could be taken as the culmination of the sequence of the fifth through ninth midrashim. This sequence is composed of multiple explanations of why the nations have no legitimate reason to object to Israel receiving the Torah: the nations knew the Torah was not for them (fourth and fifth midrashim), or the nations were offered the Torah and they declined (sixth and eighth midrashim), or the nations would never have been able to observe the Torah (seventh midrash). To complete the sequence, the tenth midrash affirms, once more, that the Torah is free to all nations, and yet, even now, only Israel is willing to receive it.

In the second way, the tenth midrash is not a culmination of the sequence that comes before, but a nuance. It may very well be that the nations did not receive the Torah for one reason or another, but that does not foreclose the possibility of their receiving Torah now. Like the wilderness, fire, and water, the Torah will always be free and open to all people. The key to the tenth midrash is the phrase *לכל באי העולם* (all who pass through the world, i.e., everybody). This phrase can be contrasted with the phrase *אומות העולם* (nations of the world), which is used in most of the previous midrashim. The phrase *לכל באי העולם* seems to be indicating that while the nations have not accepted the Torah, *individuals* from those nations can (see footnote 1432). This would coincide well with those sections in the *Mekhilta* that discuss conversion to Judaism, and how a convert

⁸²⁶ The midrash creates a nice symmetry, identifying the wilderness, fire, and water as *דברים* and also the words of Torah as *דברים*.

⁸²⁷ One other possible interpretation is to see the midrash as advocating a natural theology. A midrash in *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1 describes Torah as the blueprint of creation, the text God consulted when forming the universe. Our midrash might be indicating that if one were to observe creation, one could discern Torah. Thus, it really is free and open to all. Moreover, it is not only *like* the wilderness, fire, and water, it is *in* them, as it were. If one observes these things, one will come to know Torah.

should be welcomed and loved.⁸²⁸ Seen in this way, the tenth midrash turns both internally and externally. Internally, it calls, challenges, or reminds Israel to be open to converts; externally, it indicates (or even declares) to the world that the Torah is available to everyone. This second point is more tentative. Indeed, rabbinic generalization/universalizations often refer exclusively to the Jewish world, but since the context here is the broader world, it seems the midrash could have this external view in mind.

If one were to adopt the second way, the midrash A.6 above could be seen in a new light. By harkening back to the stories of each nation's founders—Esau, Amon and Moab, and Ishmael—midrash A.6 could be seen as communicating that each nation has a (founding) narrative by which it lives, or patterns itself, creating internal cohesion. The question presented before the people of the world is which story people want to claim as their own. Do they want to live life by the sword⁸²⁹ or adultery or theft—or by a story of redemption from an oppressive nation and an acceptance of divine commandments that give life?⁸³⁰

⁸²⁸ The *Mekhilta* itself contains rich traditions about converts. A convert is equal to a Jew with respect to every commandment in the Torah (*Pisha* 15); any *person* from the nations (אחד מכל אומות העולם) who desires to convert to Judaism should be welcomed, except those from the nation of Amaleq (*Amaleq* 2); a Jew should always be ready to welcome a person who desires to convert (*Amaleq* 3); Rahab converted to Judaism (*Amaleq* 3); a convert should rest on the Sabbath, like any Jew (*Bahodesh* 7; *Kaspa* 3); a convert should only serve as much time in debt slavery as a Jew (*Neziqin* 1); a convert who is gored by an ox should be treated the same way as a Jew (*Neziqin* 11); a convert is to be loved and welcomed (*Neziqin* 18); a convert should never be judged for his/her former life (*Neziqin* 18); a convert is welcome at any age, even if the convert is approaching death (*Neziqin* 18); a convert is to be called by the name of Jacob, i.e., Israel (*Neziqin* 18); one should return a stray ox or donkey of a convert who has turned back to his/her previous life (*Kaspa* 2).

⁸²⁹ Admittedly, the (founding) stories the midrash uses are biblical. It does not seek out the perspectives of each nation on their founding. The midrash, after all, is about biblical exegesis. However, the midrash's articulations need not necessarily be viewed altogether as one-sided distortions. For example, one might consider the founding story of Rome, in which Romulus kills his twin brother, Remus, in order to claim leadership over the city that would become Rome.

⁸³⁰ It is important to note that the stories depicted in A.6 are not the actual central stories of these nations, but a rival nation's polemical stories about them. Nevertheless, the general point about each nation

The midrash's comparison of Torah with the wilderness, fire, and water opens a gamut of possibilities for thinking about the nature of Torah, which the midrash itself does not explicate. This leaves space for the reader to consider them on his/her own. The comparison of Torah with fire is made in footnote 817. Water, of course, evokes the sense of life, necessity, and purity, especially in the context of a desert culture. The wilderness is the most unexpected. Wildernesses are vast, wild, mysterious, dangerous, and yes, even dry. Torah, thus, could be seen as a source of light, warmth, purity, life, mystery, danger, and drought. The contrast between water and fire, and water and drought creates an intriguing dynamic, cautioning that a reader will encounter extremes or opposites in Torah, and that perhaps one cannot be had without the other.

having a founding narrative still holds, as does the invitation to consider Israel's founding narrative as one's own.

Whether there was an active mission among rabbinic Jews (i.e., a movement among rabbis to convert Gentiles) during the post-Second Temple Period has been debated considerably, with views strongly expressed on both sides. For a review of the history of the debate, see Rainer Riesner, "A Pre-Christian Jewish Mission?" in *The Mission of the Early Church to the Jews and Gentiles*, eds. Jostein Adna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 211-221, 246-250. Riesner observes that two general positions have formed around the possibility of rabbinic missionary activity. One side sees a rise of missionary activity among the rabbis, perhaps as a response to Christianity, in the second and third century. Others argue that the rabbis never had a missionary drive. Riesner himself does not fully rule out the possibility of rabbinic missionary activity, but cautions that the evidence is ambiguous at best. The main texts scholars tend to turn to for evidence of activity in the second and third centuries are the Epistle to Barnabas; Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*; *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 26; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 14:11; 90:6; *Bereshit Rabbah* 39:16; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 43; *Qohelet Rabbah* 8:10; *Sifre Bamidbar* 80; and *Sifre Devarim* 32. Riesner argues such evidence should be weighed against texts like b. Hagigah 13a; b. Niddah 13b; b. Qiddushin 70b; b. Yevamoth 47b, 109b; m. Avot 1:1; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1.15.2. Riesner argues that what may actually be happening in the second and third centuries is a Gentile attraction to rabbinic Judaism, which leads to, for many of these Gentiles, a desire to become a proselyte. This is different from rabbinic Jews actively seeking converts. More recently, see Michael F. Bird, *Crossing Over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 72-76. Bird concludes that rabbinic statements, for the most part, are positive toward converts to Judaism, but there is no evidence of a "widespread" missionary effort. The ambiguity of our midrash will certainly not settle the debate. If anything, the ambiguity allows for flexibility in its use. On the one hand, it helps explain why other nations do not follow Torah. On the other hand, it can be used to argue that the Torah is still open to Gentiles.

4.7.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The thought of joining Judaism, of course, would have been unthinkable to Augustine. Many of the evangelical commentators, however, discuss extensively, and in positive ways, ancient Israel's mission of acting as God's witness to the nations,⁸³¹ and its task of assisting God in redeeming the world,⁸³² bringing others into communion with God, interceding for others, and preserving God's word.⁸³³ It has become a stereotype to think of Judaism today as a non-missionary religion.⁸³⁴ Non-Jews can, nevertheless, convert, even if they are not actively sought out. Conversion, of course, is actively encouraged in Christianity, and for many, missionizing non-Christians is a mandate. For evangelicals in particular, Jews are no exception.⁸³⁵ The topic of conversion calls to mind a text by Pope John Paul II, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. In it, the pope argues that sincere interreligious dialogue requires an openness to difference, a willingness to earnestly listen and consider what the other has to say, and an unyielding search for truth, even if that search eventually leads to conversion.⁸³⁶ That might seem frightening and

⁸³¹ Fretheim, 21-22.

⁸³² Enns, 396-397.

⁸³³ Stuart, 44-45, 422-424.

⁸³⁴ It is worth noting that in the Reform movement, there is a tendency to encourage the non-Jewish partner in an intermarriage to consider conversion to Judaism. For example, see Michael Luo, "Reform Jews Hope to Unmix Mixed Marriages," *New York Times*, February 12, 2006; and Resolutions, "Outreach," Union for Reform Judaism, <https://urj.org/what-we-believe/resolutions/outreach> (accessed June 12, 2019). In addition, Chabad actively encourages non-Jews to become Noahides, or followers of the Seven Noahide Laws. For example, see Chabad.org, "The 7 Noahide Laws: Universal Morality," Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/62221/jewish/The-7-Noahide-Laws-Universal-Morality.htm (accessed June 12, 2019). The website lists the Seven Noahide Laws.

⁸³⁵ See Kate Shellnutt, "Evangelicals Still Want to Evangelize Jews, but Not for the Same Reason," *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/february/jewish-evangelism-survey-end-times-chosen-people-rosenberg.html> (accessed June 12, 2019).

⁸³⁶ John Paul II, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html (accessed March 6, 2019), nos. 41, 48-49. On the matter of conversion, the pope cites Secretariat for Non-Christians' "The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," 37. While it is clear from the Secretariat

even heretical, but if dialogue is to occur, and if it is to be earnest in its search for truth, then nothing can be held back, including one's own convictions.

Throughout the Christian commentaries, there is an abundance of positive evaluations of the Law. As stated in the comparison section of A.1 above, for Augustine, the Law instructs a Christian on how to live a good and just life.⁸³⁷ The evangelical commentators move in a similar direction. Stuart, for example, argues that the Law helps one "draw near to God," and instructs a person on how to live a redeemed life.⁸³⁸ One can appreciate the direction these positive descriptions have taken, particularly the contemporary efforts, in light of the New Perspective. The *Mekhilta's* similes, I believe, not only enhance these descriptions, but challenge one to perceive Torah in even more dynamic ways. On their own, the descriptions by the Christian commentators encourage one to see Torah as an instrument that brings people closer to God or instructs people on how to live a just life. The *Mekhilta's* similes invite one to see Torah as more than that: Torah is like a desert, fire, and water. There is a vividness to these images, depicting the text as full of light, warmth, purity, life, and mystery, but also danger and drought. In Dozeman's comments on the Law, he cites Ze'ev Falk, who argues that Israel understands law and spirituality as one and the same.⁸³⁹ The *Mekhilta's* similes facilitate one's ability to interact with the Torah in this way, helping one envision Torah study as a journey, a spiritual endeavor, filled with life, mystery, danger, and thirst. In this

for Non-Christians' document that the Christian hope is that all will convert to Christianity, the document also states that "the law of conscience is sovereign," and that especially in religious matters, one should be free to follow one's conscience. See Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 9:4 (Oct 1985): 38. See also *Dignitatis Humanae* 3.

⁸³⁷ *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19-21; 122, 8-9; s. 8.

⁸³⁸ Stuart, 44-45.

⁸³⁹ Dozeman, 462.

understanding, Torah is not simply a place one goes to periodically to receive instruction, but a place in which one dwells, wanders around, and in the process, finds life.

4.8 CONCLUSION FOR FIRST WORD

Broadly speaking, the *Mekhilta*'s exegesis of the first commandment explores the following issues: the nature of the relationship between commandments and story (A.1); the nature of the relationship between God and Israel (A.2); the nature of God—One Power or Two (A.3); the relationship between God, Israel, the Torah, the nations, and the natural world (A.4-A.8); the relationship between the tribes (and people) within Israel (A.3 and A.9); revelation and the nature of the Torah (A.10); and the nature of Israel's slavery in Egypt (A.11-A.12).

One cannot help but notice that each one of the midrashim presents an idea that is theological in nature. If one were to borrow the categories used in Christian systematic theology, one could say that the *Mekhilta* touches on theology proper, or the study of the nature of God (A.2-A.3); soteriology, or the study of salvation/redemption (A.4-A.8 and A.10); theology of religions, or the study of the relationship between one's own religion and others (A.4-A.8); biblical theology, or the study of the nature of the Bible (A.10); theological anthropology, or the study of the nature of humanity (A.4-A.12); and ecclesiology, or the study of the nature of Israel (A.3 and A.9).⁸⁴⁰ Outside of the typology of systematic theology is the study of the relationship between commandments and story

⁸⁴⁰ Interestingly, *ecclesia* is a cognate of כְּנֶסֶת. The Hebrew word for church is כְּנֶסֶת, and for synagogue is בֵּית הַכְּנֶסֶת.

(A.1). This, though, has resonance with practical theology.

In a recent monograph, Cass Fisher argues that the *Mekhilta* does perform theology extensively, despite not having a “synonymous word” for it.⁸⁴¹ The way in which the *Mekhilta* performs theology, Fisher argues, is through four distinct *religious practices*: (1) exegesis (the explication of difficult texts that would otherwise challenge the rabbinic belief that the Bible is perfect and free of contradictions, gaps, or redundancies); (2) hermeneutics (the effort to make the biblical text relevant and meaningful in one’s own time); (3) rational reflection on divine perfection (the assurance that no biblical text contradicts the rabbinic assumption of God’s perfection and greatness); and (4) religious experience (the use of real, present-day communal encounters with God to describe or explain biblical texts). Fisher argues that these four practices gave the rabbis occasion to study Scripture and to promote theological beliefs through that study. The *Mekhilta* bears witness to a whole generation of rabbis who engage in these practices—practices, which in turn reveal that these rabbis engaged *deeply* in theological reflection.⁸⁴²

One can see Fisher’s four religious practices throughout our midrashim: exegesis occupies A.1-A.3, A.6, and A.11-A.12; hermeneutics covers A.1, A.3, and A.5-A.10; rational reflection manifests in A.4-A.5; and religious experience can be found in A.3.

⁸⁴¹ Cass Fisher, *Contemplative Nation: A Philosophical Account of Jewish Theological Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). Fisher defines theology broadly as “discourse about God and the divine-human relationship” (4-7). Fisher offers his argument to the field of rabbinic studies, in particular, and Jewish studies in general, which have often argued the contrary. Among scholars who argue that the rabbis did not engage in theology, some maintain that since the term “theology” did not exist in the rabbinic vocabulary, the discipline itself did not exist. Rather than theology, these rabbis engaged in homiletics (i.e., non-systematic, folkloric speculations in service of pedagogy). Fisher, however, rightly argues that the absence of the term does not mean that what the term defines was not a preoccupation among the rabbis. I understand my use of the term “theology” as a scholarly imposition on the material, a description of phenomena for the purpose of analysis and comparison.

⁸⁴² Fisher, 101-152.

This evidence serves as a confirmation of Fisher's argument.⁸⁴³ However, I would like to propose that there is something else happening in the *Mekhilta's* explication of Exod 20:2, which builds on Fisher's argument. Fisher states that his focus is on the rabbis' use of Scripture to promote theology. To do this, he concentrates on individual midrashim, and foregoes larger questions surrounding the function of literary units in the *Mekhilta*. I would like to entertain the question of what might be said about the literary unit of the *Mekhilta's* commentary on Exod 20:2. The *Mekhilta* understands Exod 20:2 as a commandment,⁸⁴⁴ and yet, all of the *Mekhilta's* midrashim revolve around theological issues, rather than *halakhah*. What is the meaning of this? Some scholars believe the commandment of Exod 20:2 is to assent to the belief that God is the one God who is master of the universe.⁸⁴⁵ While this is clearly part of the *Mekhilta's* understanding of the commandment, it seems to me the twelve midrashim of this chapter of the *Mekhilta*, seen together, could be interpreted as having another aspect of the commandment in mind: to theologize, or to engage in theological study and reflection, to *know God*, to know what it means for the Lord to be *your God*, to know the reason Israel has been *brought out of Egypt*, to know why *Israel alone stands at Mount Sinai*. To be sure, this is by no means a

⁸⁴³ Fisher seems to vacillate between whether the rabbis read their own theological views into the text, or whether they discerned theological content from the text. He seems to promote far more heavily the former, without paying much attention to the latter. He writes in his introduction to the *Mekhilta*, "What becomes apparent through such a [theological] reading [of the *Mekhilta*] is that specific identifiable presuppositions drive the scriptural interpretation of the rabbis. Frequently in the *Mekhilta*, these presuppositions revolve around notions of God's greatness" (104). The question one might immediately ask is where the rabbis gained these presuppositions that they then project onto the text. One might say they were received, which is reasonable to assume for at least some of the rabbinic views. But I would also argue that the rabbis were also informed by their reading—that the biblical text presented challenges that also formed and changed the rabbis' theology. I would consider the first midrash in our chapter a prime example of this. The midrashist is presented with a serious question about the relation between story and commandments, which leads to an intriguing conclusion.

⁸⁴⁴ See the introduction to the dissertation on the *Mekhilta's* understanding and division of the Decalogue, and p. 277.

⁸⁴⁵ E.g., Nahum Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: JPS, 1991), 109.

commandment to build a systematic theology. The directive is much simpler than that: Israel is commanded to know God.⁸⁴⁶ The ways in which the *Mekhilta* engages Exod 20:2 simultaneously define, exemplify, and fulfill that commandment.

For a Christian, the *Mekhilta*'s exegesis provides an opportunity to think of Exod 20:2 in a new way. Many of the evangelical commentators describe Exod 20:2 as a prologue, or the recounting, in the style of a suzerain-vassal treaty, of the historical relationship between God and Israel. By saving Israel, God now has the right to impose commandments, and Israel is called to respond with a pledge of loyalty.⁸⁴⁷ Put another way, out of grace comes the law: through a gracious act, God has rescued Israel, and is now calling Israel to be a holy people.⁸⁴⁸ Others argue that the purpose of Exod 20:2 is to indicate that the Decalogue comes directly from God,⁸⁴⁹ that God wants a personal relationship with Israel,⁸⁵⁰ or that God wishes to form Israel into a redeemed community,

⁸⁴⁶ This, of course, would be in distinction to more traditional Jewish understandings of Exod 20:2. For example, in Maimonides' classic codification of Jewish law, *Mishneh Torah*, the first positive commandment in *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* is Exod 20:2, which is a commandment to know that God exists. Maimonides then explains at the beginning of *Sefer Ha-Madda* that this commandment means more specifically that God is independent of the universe and that God is the omnipotent creator of the universe. I propose that there may be more to the commandment than this, and that the *Mekhilta*'s twelve midrashim could be interpreted together as being optimistic about knowledge of God, perhaps more than what later scholars such as Maimonides would argue. On this matter, Fisher writes that according to the *Mekhilta*, "it is possible to speak of God's attributes so long as one realizes that the divine exceeds that which one can say about it. What lends credibility to this view is the general absence of claims of divine ineffability in rabbinic theology. While disputes exist about *what* can be said of God or *how* one should go about speaking of the divine, God is not a surd for the rabbis and they are not proponents of a strict ineffability" (147).

⁸⁴⁷ Alexander, 96; Bailey, 218; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 36; Dozeman, 479-480; Garrett, 54, 473; Hamilton, 327-328; Harman, 214; W. Janzen, 254-255; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 41-45; Larson, 140-141; Mackay, 10; Motyer, 215-216; Pokrifka, 215-216; Roper, 322; Ryken, 484, 518; Stuart, 446-447.

⁸⁴⁸ Alexander, 96-100, 104-105; Ashby, 88; Bailey, 209; Bruckner, 170-173, 180-181; Carpenter, *Exodus 1-18*, 27; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 12-13, 38; Dozeman, 415-416, 424-426, 438-447, 474; Enns, 411-412; Garrett, 139-141, 459-460, 469, 473; Gilbert and Stallman, 40; Gowan, 175-177, 182, 187; Harman, 205, 212; J. Janzen, 132-136 142-143; W. Janzen, 26, 237-239, 250; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 195-201, 397-410; Larsson, 128-129, 138-140, 142; Mackay, 322, 338-339; Motyer, 195-201, 213, n. 2, 214-215, 220-221, n. 17; Roper, 315-316; Ryken, 457, 495-498; Scarlata, 148; Wendland, 120-121; Wiersbe, 102-103, 107-108.

⁸⁴⁹ Alexander, 101-102; Ashby, 84; Bruckner, 181; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32-33; Coggins, 77-78; Fretheim, 223-224; Gowan, 180; Pokrifka, 215; Wiersbe, 108-109.

⁸⁵⁰ Alexander, 102; Currid, 35; Fretheim, 223-224; Gowan, 175-177, 182-183, 187; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 24-27; Larsson, 141; Page, 80; Ryken, 484-485.

rather than enslave it, as Egypt did.⁸⁵¹ A minority position does see Exod 20:2 as part of the first commandment. Together with Exod 20:3, the commandment directs Israel to recite vv. 2-3 and thereby remember God's saving act and the loyalty that Israel is called to in response.⁸⁵²

There exists a strong emphasis among evangelicals on a personal relationship with God. One could argue it is at the center of evangelical belief. Even some of the commentators argue that Exod 20:2 is proof of the necessity of a personal relationship. And yet, while most of evangelical commentators argue that the Decalogue contains *the* list of God's desires for Christians,⁸⁵³ none argue that it says anything about knowing God. Evangelical scholarship, by and large, views the Decalogue as a delineation of actions to perform or refrain from. While actions are key to a relationship, so is knowledge of the person with whom one wishes to bond. Perhaps this may be a place in which the *Mekhilta* can be helpful. Rather than interpreting Exod 20:2 only as prologue, an evangelical might follow the interpretive process of the *Mekhilta*, and take Exod 20:2 as a commandment to theologize, to know God to the best of one's ability. Such an interpretive move may bolster even further an effort toward a personal relationship with God. In this understanding, God's first word expresses the divine will to be known.

⁸⁵¹ Ashby, 88; Fretheim, 223-224; J. Janzen, 132-136 142-143; W. Janzen, 26, 237-239, 250; Motyer, 195-201, 213, n. 2, 214-215, 220-221, n. 17.

⁸⁵² Bruckner, 182. See also Larsson, 139.

⁸⁵³ T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 105; Bailey, 215; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 34; Currid, 34; Dozeman, 469-474, 479-480; Enns, 419-420, 431-433; Fretheim, 223, 230; Garrett, 139-141, 459-460, 469, 473; Hamilton, 321; J. Janzen, 141; W. Janzen, 261; Larsson, 142; Mackay, 339-340, 342; Motyer, 215, 221-222; Page, 80; Roper, 321; Ryken, 486; Scarlata, 158-159; Stuart, 441-442; Wendland, 115-116, 122-123; Wiersbe, 108.

5.0 CHAPTER 5: *MEKHILTA D'RABBI ISHMAEL*: SECOND WORD

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

-Exod 20:3-6

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the Second Word of the Decalogue is located in *Bahodesh* 6 of Lauterbach's edition.⁸⁵⁴ This commentary can be divided into eleven distinct midrashim, which I have identified as B.1 through B.11 for the purpose of convenient referencing. The exposition in this chapter concentrates on six of the midrashim. These midrashim are:

1. Midrash B.1 – which determines the relationship between Exod 20:2 and Exod 20:3.
2. Midrash B.3 – which proposes different meanings than “other gods” for אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים in Exod 20:3.
3. Midrash B.5 – which explicates precisely what idols/representations are prohibited in Exod 20:4-5.
4. Midrash B.9 – which explains what the biblical text means by describing God as “jealous.”
5. Midrash B.10 – which maps out the mechanics of cross-generational punishment and cross-generational blessing.
6. Midrash B.11 – which identifies the people who “love me and keep my commandments” in Exod 20:6.

⁸⁵⁴ Lauterbach, 319-325 The Horowitz-Rabin edition gives the Babylonian annual cycle's weekly lectionary divisions priority over the Palestinian “triennial cycle” original to this text and labels this section *Yitro* 6 with a secondary identification as *Bahodesh* (222-227).

The procedure I will follow in explicating and comparing the material in this chapter will be the same as chapter 4. In the concluding remark for the Second Word, I will discuss how one of the overriding messages communicated throughout the *Mekhilta* is the gravity of the Second Word, and the extent Israel must go to prevent itself from committing idolatry. This is also communicated in the Decalogue itself, particularly in its motive clause for this commandment. The textual witnesses of the *Mekhilta* present three possible ways in which the *Mekhilta* understands the mechanics of cross-generational punishment. Two of them seek to mitigate the instances in which it will occur, while one of them does not. Whichever version one chooses, punishment will ensue if the Second Word is violated. The *Mekhilta*'s insistence on the necessity of punishment for violations of the commandment presents evangelicals an opportunity to (re)visit and (re)consider the relationship between punishment, grace, love, and forgiveness.

5.2 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* B.1

Thou Shalt Not Have Other Gods Before Me. Why is this said? Because it says: "I am the Lord thy God." To give a parable: A king of flesh and blood entered a province.⁸⁵⁵ His attendants said to him: Issue some decrees upon the people.⁸⁵⁶ He, however, told them: No!⁸⁵⁷ When they will have accepted my reign I shall issue decrees upon them.⁸⁵⁸ For if they do not accept my reign how will they carry out my decrees?⁸⁵⁹ Likewise, God

⁸⁵⁵ The word for "province" is מדינה, which can also mean "large city" or "country."

⁸⁵⁶ The Munich manuscript, *Yalqut Shimoni*, and *Yalqut* manuscripts to the Pentateuch (Oxford 2637) have אלינו (upon us) instead of אליהם (upon them). This makes the king's attendants (עבדיו) Israel. Otherwise, the king's attendants are separate from the inhabitants of the city.

⁸⁵⁷ The printed editions lack לאי (No), making God's response less forceful.

⁸⁵⁸ The Munich manuscript and the Constantinople edition have עליכם (upon you) instead of עליהם (upon them). See footnote 856. This continues to make the attendants Israel.

⁸⁵⁹ Instead of שאם אינן מקבלים מלכותי היאך מקיימין גזירותי (for if they do not accept my reign how will they carry out my decrees), the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have

said to Israel: “I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt not have other gods—I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves in Egypt⁸⁶⁰.” And when they said to Him: “Yes, yes⁸⁶¹,” He continued: “Now, just as you accepted My reign, you must also accept My decrees: ‘Thou shalt not have other gods before Me.’” R. Simon b. Yoḥai says: What is said further on: “I am the Lord your God,” (Lev. 18.2) means: “I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves⁸⁶² at Sinai,” and when they said: “Yes, yes,” He continued: “Well, you have accepted My reign, now accept My decrees: ‘After the doings of the land of Egypt,’ etc.” (ibid. v. 3). What is said here: “I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out from the land of Egypt,” means: “I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves⁸⁶³,” and when they said to Him: “Yes, yes,” He continued: “You have accepted My reign⁸⁶⁴, now accept My decrees: ‘Thou shalt not have other gods.’”

The *Mekhilta* begins its commentary on the Second Word with two interpretations of Exod 20:3. Both interpretations deal with a redundancy between Exod 20:2 and 20:3. The first interpretation opens with a question: למה נאמר (why is this said?). This question is a common formula in R. Ishmael midrashim. The formula cites a verse and questions its meaning or purpose. It then introduces another verse that could potentially be misread. This potential misreading is prevented by the meaning of the first verse. Thus, through

לא יקבלו גזירותי לא יקבלו מלכותי לא יקבלו (for if they do not accept my kingdom, they will not accept my decrees), making God’s reasoning more forceful.

⁸⁶⁰ *Efat Zedek* lacks במצרים (in Egypt), making the location more ambiguous.

⁸⁶¹ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have כן (yes) instead of הן והן (yes, yes), making Israel’s acceptance comparatively less emphatic.

⁸⁶² It is also worth noting that the Munich manuscript lacks the section from הן והן (I am he whose reign you have taken upon yourselves). This is most likely a scribal error, known as homeoteleuton, in which the scribe jumped from “... in Egypt.” And when they said to Him: “Yes, yes” to “...at Sinai,” and when they said: “Yes, yes.” The scribe only included the second “and when they said to him, ‘yes, yes,’” phrase. The error leaves the midrash stating that Israel accepted God’s reign at Sinai. For more on this, see footnote 863.

⁸⁶³ The Oxford manuscript adds במצרים (in Egypt) after מלכותי (my reign) rendering the line: “I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves *in Egypt*” (emphasis mine). The Munich manuscript and the Horowitz-Rabin edition add בסיני (at Sinai) instead of במצרים (in Egypt), rendering the line: “I am He whose reign you have taken upon yourselves *at Sinai*” (emphasis mine). These differences form a tension in this midrash: where exactly does Israel accept God’s reign? Is it in Egypt or is it at Sinai? It is worth noting that the manuscripts are consistent in naming a location where Israel accepts God’s reign.

⁸⁶⁴ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition add באהבה (in/with love) after מלכותי (my reign). What otherwise might be interpreted as a strict exchange of covenantal vows is in the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition an exchange born out of affection: Israel accepts God’s reign because Israel loves God.

this juxtaposition, the purpose of the first verse is made evident.⁸⁶⁵ Our text follows this midrashic formula, except with one significant variation. The *Mekhilta* begins by citing Exod 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me.” It then asks למה נאמר (why is this said), and responds with Exod 20:2: “I am the Lord your God.” Instead of a possible *misreading* of Exod 20:2 motivating the question למה נאמר, the motivation seems to be a possible *redundancy*. The biblical text begins with “I am the Lord your God.”

Unambiguously, God is Israel’s God. After establishing this point, the biblical text then goes on to state, “You shall have no other gods before me.” This command seems unnecessary. If God is Israel’s God, then it seems obvious that Israel should not have any other god before God. Naturally, then, the *Mekhilta* asks why Exod 20:3 is written. What makes it necessary?

The first interpretation answers this with a parable. A human king enters a certain province/city/country. His attendants⁸⁶⁶ recommend that the king immediately impose

⁸⁶⁵ The description of the midrashic formula is summarized from Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia: Univeristy of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 52-54.

⁸⁶⁶ The midrash does not identify the attendants in its explanation of the parable. It seems likely, if it had, that they would be understood as angels. According to David Fass, angels often served a pedagogical function in rabbinic texts: they were used to teach Israel that God loved her and valued her—to such a degree that Israel’s worth surpassed the angels’. See David E. Fass, “How the Angels Do Serve,” *Judaism* 40:3 (Summer 1991): 281-289. Max Kadushin makes a similar point, which Fass notes. See Kadushin, *Conceptual Approach*, 106. Surveying several rabbinic sources, including b. Sanhedrin 20b; b. Ketuvim 104a; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 5:10; b. Hagigah 14b; b. Shabbat 88b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 11:7; b. Sotah 12b; b. Hagigah 16a; b. Berakhot 60b; *Pirke d’Rabbi Eliezer* 24; *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:10, 9:10, Fass observes that angels in rabbinic literature resided in heaven. They assisted God in the creation of the world and other good works; they also assisted the righteous by petitioning for them or keeping them safe. In addition, they had a hand in the bringing of life or death. They are powerful beings, but not perfect. In our midrash, the attendants play the role of consultants. Peter Schäfer, in his discussion of *Bereshit Rabbah* 8:4, 8:8; *Pesiqta Rabbati* 14:9; b. Sanhedrin 38b, sees among the rabbis a tendency to depict God as unconcerned with the angels’ advice, despite soliciting it. One strong message, through this tactic, seems to be that consultation with angels exposes, not only the angels’ inferiority to God, but their inferiority to humans, as well. Another message is that consultation with angels serves a pedagogical function: God has no need of advice, but God’s willingness to hear the angels teaches that even the wisest person should listen to others. For Schäfer, the overall goal of the rabbis, in their description of angels, is to prevent any notion that there exist heavenly beings on par with God, a belief they knew could be derived from Scripture itself. See Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton:

laws on the inhabitants of the province. But the king wants subjects, not slaves. Thus, the king replies that it would be impossible to do so, if the inhabitants do not accept the king's rulership.⁸⁶⁷ The midrash then compares God to this parable's king: like the human king, God must ask Israel to accept God's rulership. The moment in Egypt the midrash has in mind may be Exod 4:27-31, when Moses and Aaron leave the wilderness and come to the elders of Israel, informing them what God had said to Moses at the burning bush. The midrash may also believe that Israel's willingness to be rescued by God is an (implicit) acceptance of God's rulership.⁸⁶⁸ Whichever the case, at Sinai, Exod 20:2 becomes God's reminder to the people that they had previously accepted God's rule in Egypt, giving God the right now to impose commandments, which God proceeds to do, beginning with Exod 20:3. The parable is operating with the position that imposing rulership is an ineffective way of governing, even if it is God who is doing it. Ruling without consent will inevitably create tension and strife. Thus, apparently, even the "Master of the Universe" must still request to be one's lord. With this theological position, the midrash dispels a potential redundancy in the biblical text: Exod 20:2 explains God's right to impose commandments, and Exod 20:3 begins those commandments.

The second midrash is transmitted in the name of R. Simon b. Yoḥai. His

Princeton University Press, 2012), 165-178. In light of these views, implicit within our midrash seems to be a view that God's attendants are unaware of the proper way to make a covenant. This not only reveals the superiority of God, but the superiority of Israel, as well. Israel knows that true devotion cannot be imposed; it can only be sought. This, indeed, marks the difference between Pharaoh and God. While the former forced servitude, the latter proposed service. Could it be that the angels spoke from their own experience? Might one distinction between the angels and humanity be that to the angels, God is like Pharaoh?

⁸⁶⁷ See the variations in the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition in footnotes 857 and 859, which alter the forcefulness of the king's responses.

⁸⁶⁸ See footnotes 862 and 863, in which the Munich manuscript and the Horowitz-Rabin edition place Israel's acceptance of God's reign at Sinai. This makes sense, as Israel voices three times in Exodus at Sinai (Exod 19:8; 24:3, 7) that it will accept everything God says.

interpretation employs a method known as *gezerah shavah*. A *gezerah shavah* links together two biblical texts that have a word or phrase in common. In this link, one text can help interpret the *halakhic* meaning of the other text. As Yadin notes, the R. Ishmael midrashim are aware that *gezerah shavah* could be used in a myriad of ways, bringing together *any* two texts that share a word, which could produce a *wide* range of *halakhic* meaning. To establish control over the gamut of possibilities, and to help direct the reader, the R. Ishmael midrashim teach that *gezerah shavah* can only utilize words or phrases that are *mufneh lehaqish*, or redundant in their present context.⁸⁶⁹ If a biblical text has a word or phrase that is redundant, then a *gezerah shavah* can link that biblical text to another that also has the word or phrase to facilitate meaning. In our midrash, the phrase “I am the Lord your God” (Exod 20:2) causes redundancy in its proximity with “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3), as both convey the same meaning. This frees Exod 20:2 up to be used in a *gezerah shavah*. R. Simon b. Yoḥai links Exod 20:2 with Lev 18:2, which also states, “I am the Lord your God.”

R. Simon b. Yoḥai introduces Lev 18:2-3 with הוא שנאמר להלן (that which is said there). By doing this, R. Simon b. Yoḥai signals that Lev 18:2-3 requires interpretation. The full text of Lev 18:2-3 states, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes.” R. Simon b. Yoḥai divides this text in half, and interprets each part. “I am the Lord your God” (Lev 18:2) should be understood as the moment when God reminded Israel of the divine rulership that they accepted at Sinai, when they said

⁸⁶⁹ Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 60, 82-83.

emphatically, “Yes, yes.” This consent grants God the right to impose commandments upon Israel, and God proceeds to do so in Lev 18:3: “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt,” etc. The Lev 18:2-3 text, from the perspective of a contemporary reader, may not seem to require much explanation. It serves as the introduction to a series of commandments regarding sexual relations. But for R. Simon b. Yoḥai, Lev 18:2-3 is ambiguous in what it prohibits. In its fuller context, Lev 18:2-5 states:

2“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. 3You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. 4My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God. 5You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the Lord.”

In R. Simon b. Yoḥai’s understanding, vv. 4-5 introduce the commandments regarding sexual conduct (vv. 6-23). This means vv. 2-3 are in reference to something else.⁸⁷⁰ It is not clear from the most immediate context what statutes of the Egyptians and Canaanites Israel should not keep. This is the reason why R. Simon b. Yoḥai employs a *gezerah shavah*, and links Lev 18:2-3 to Exod 20:2-3. R. Simon b. Yoḥai introduces Exod 20:2-3 with הוא שנאמר כאן (that which is said here), signaling that these verses will solve the interpretive issue. Again, R. Simon b. Yoḥai divides the biblical text in half, and interprets each part in a similar way. The first half, “I am the Lord your God” (Exod 20:2), is the moment in which God reminded Israel of God’s rulership, when Israel

⁸⁷⁰ The phrase “I am the Lord your God” appears twenty-five times in the Pentateuch, with twenty-one appearing in Leviticus: Exod 20:2; Lev 11:44; 18:2-3, 4, 30; 19:3, 4, 12, 25, 31, 32, 34, 36; 20:7; 23:22, 43; 24:22; 25:17, 38, 55; 26:1, 13; Num 10:10; 15:41; Deut 5:6. Each appearance is in proximity to a specific commandment(s), or is part of a description of God/Israel. The only exception is Lev 18:2-3. Here, God commands Israel to not imitate the people of Egypt and Canaan, but does not specify what. Instead, God states again “I am the Lord your God” in Lev 18:4, before moving into specific commandments. The relative seclusion of the phrase “I am the Lord your God” from specific commandments or descriptions of God/Israel in Lev 18:2-3 may have spurred the midrash, as might the repeated language of “statutes and ordinances” in this passage.

said, “Yes, yes.” Now, with the right to impose commandments, God continues with Exod 20:3: “You shall have no other gods before me,” etc. With the *gezerah shavah* established, it becomes clear that the “statutes” of the Egyptians and Canaanites that God prohibits in Lev 18:2-3 are those articulated in Exod 20:3ff, beginning with a prohibition on polytheism.⁸⁷¹

The solution in the second interpretation could be seen as essentially identical to the solution in the first interpretation: both see Exod 20:2 as a reminder of God’s right to impose commandments, which are then articulated, beginning with Exod 20:3. However, the second interpretation, by employing *gezerah shavah*, introduces two ramifications. In establishing a link between Exod 20:2-3 and Lev 18:2-3, R. Simon b. Yoḥai can be seen as implying that both texts are given at the same time (i.e., at Sinai). This reflects a broader rabbinic principle that *all* of Torah was given at Sinai.⁸⁷² In addition, the *gezerah shavah* can be seen as implying that Israel committed idolatry in Egypt. If God now commands Israel to not imitate Egyptian idolatry, it would be possible to assume that is precisely what Israel did heretofore.

What is particularly fascinating about the two interpretations in B.1 is that they begin the “numeration” of the Decalogue, not with Exod 20:2 as the first word, but with Exod 20:3, making Exod 20:2 a prologue of sorts.⁸⁷³ The similarity between the *Mekhilta*’s *mashal* for Exod 20:3 and its *mashal* for Exod 20:2 (see A.1) is uncanny. In

⁸⁷¹ See *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 13:3 for a parallel text. Here, the text which Israel accepts is not the Decalogue but Leviticus 18. Thus, the statutes that God prohibits do not begin with polytheism, but incest.

⁸⁷² E.g., see m. Avot 1:1 and *Mekhilta Neziqin* 1.

⁸⁷³ How this interpretation would divide the rest of the commandments is not clear. It may envision Exod 20:4 as the next commandment.

both parables, a king enters a province and is unable to immediately become king.⁸⁷⁴ The king must either perform a mighty act, or make a request, in order for the people to accept the king's rulership and commandments. When the king does this, the king gains the right to be the inhabitants' king.⁸⁷⁵ Their reply, in both parables, is the same: הן והן ("Yes, yes"). The similarity of the parables raises a question of the *Mekhilta's* intent.⁸⁷⁶ What is the *Mekhilta* trying to do? It initially treats Exod 20:2 as the first word.⁸⁷⁷ But then, when it turns to Exod 20:3-6, the *Mekhilta* views Exod 20:2 as the prologue, and Exod 20:3-6 as the first word. To complicate the matter further, in its interpretation of Exod 20:15, the *Mekhilta* states that the Decalogue was arranged on the stone tablets with five on one tablet and five on the other.⁸⁷⁸ On the first tablet, the commandments begin with "I am the Lord thy God" (i.e., Exod 20:2), followed by "Thou shalt have no other gods" (i.e., Exod 20:3-6) as the next commandment. After this comes "Thou shalt not take" (Exod 20:7).

Was the *Mekhilta's* editor(s) aware that two different numeration systems were being presented in its treatment of the Decalogue, one in which Exod 20:2 is the first word, and the other in which Exod 20:3-6 is? Which numeration does the *Mekhilta* support? Do such questions expect a level of systematic presentation that the *Mekhilta*

⁸⁷⁴ While in midrash A.1 the king is rebuked by the people, forcing the king to perform a feat on behalf of the people, the king already knows in B.1 that the people will not accept his rulership without God first making the request. It is his attendants who are unaware of this.

⁸⁷⁵ While the emphasis is on the right to be king in A.1, the emphasis in B.1 is on the right to impose commandments. Both interpretations, nevertheless, involve both issues.

⁸⁷⁶ The parables in A.1 and B.1 only appear in the *Mekhilta* and *Yalqut Shim'oni*.

⁸⁷⁷ One might wonder if the *Mekhilta*, when interpreting Exod 20:2, intended it to be taken as the prologue. The question posed at the beginning of A.1—"why were the Ten Commandments not said at the beginning of the Torah?"—however, gives the strong impression that Exod 20:2 is the first word. If the *Mekhilta* intended Exod 20:2 to be taken as the prologue, then the mashal in A.1 would have been more appropriately placed at the beginning of the *Mekhilta's* interpretations of Exod 20:3-6.

⁸⁷⁸ See *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 8.

refuses to provide or is not interested in? In other words, was the redactor(s) of the *Mekhilta* simply not concerned with the numeration of the Decalogue? How one answers these questions depends on one's position on the purpose of a midrashic collection. David Stern argues that midrashic collections were seen by their editors as resource books for rabbis, used to supplement and even surpass oral memory and education. Stern believes the midrashic collections began as the "private notebooks" of various rabbis, which eventually grew in volume and influence, as new rabbis and editors inherited these books, adding to them and redacting them in various ways.⁸⁷⁹ Martin Jaffey's assessment moves in a similar direction when he calls the rabbinic compilations "anthologies." He adds that inheritors of an anthology thought it permissible to alter the content, using it as inspiration for new interpretations, which in turn led the inheritors to change the written material. This cycle continued until at some point the anthologies were understood as actual tradition, instead of storage units, and became increasingly static.⁸⁸⁰ Carol Bakhos argues that to presume the rabbis had no criteria in their selection of midrashim for anthologies seems highly suspect.⁸⁸¹ While uncovering the redactor's original intent may prove impossible, it seems reasonable to gather a compilation's theme or overall message by examining the content and structure.⁸⁸² To complicate matters, however, the variations in all of the manuscripts and textual witnesses indicate that there were many textual

⁸⁷⁹ David Stern, "Anthology and Polysemy in Classic Midrash," in *The Anthology in Jewish Literature*, ed. David Stern (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108-142.

⁸⁸⁰ Martin S. Jaffee, "Rabbinic Authorship as a Collective Enterprise," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature*, eds. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Martin S. Jaffee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-37.

⁸⁸¹ One can point to examples in the *Mekhilta* itself, where rabbis reference views that they reject (e.g., the "two powers" in A.3).

⁸⁸² Carol Bakhos, "Method(ological) Matters in the Study of Midrash," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash*, ed. Carol Bakhos (Boston: Brill, 2006), 161-187.

traditions of the midrashim and their compilations.⁸⁸³ The midrashic compilations were not authoritative in the way the Talmud was, leading them to have a higher degree of fluidity. This makes determining any editorial intent extremely difficult. As Bakhos postulates, it may indeed be impossible in various instances.

When we take these views into account, the *Mekhilta* does not seem explicitly to accept or reject either numeration. One might take A.1 and the view found in the *Mekhilta*'s interpretations of Exod 20:15 (commandment against stealing) as the *Mekhilta*'s definitive position on the numeration; one would have to contend with B.1, though, and explain why it is not specifically rejected. One could also argue either A.1 or B.1 is an anomaly or a tolerated alternative. At the very least, these interpretations indicate that there was more than one tradition of numeration still in existence at the time of the editing of the *Mekhilta*.⁸⁸⁴ It may very well be that the (final) editor(s) of the *Mekhilta* did not argue for any particular numeration; that was not the concern or goal. Rather, what was preserved were those midrashim of the Decalogue that were worth keeping (e.g., they solved potential problems in the biblical text, they expanded the meaning of the text, they provided useful exegetical techniques, they offered views worth considering). It was then left to the reader to decide how to numerate the ten (or not to). Perhaps the similarity of the *mashal* in Exod 20:2 and 20:3 could be the *Mekhilta*'s own way of saying that there is validity in either numeration. Whether that was the intent or

⁸⁸³ On this matter, see Stemberger, "Mekhilta de'R. Ishmael," 465-474. Stemberger argues that the people who prepared the printed editions appear to have used manuscripts of the *Mekhilta* that are distinct from the Oxford and Munich manuscripts, and have since been lost. It also seems likely that these people also corrected their manuscripts, "based on conjecture and parallels in other rabbinic works" (467).

⁸⁸⁴ Various sources from the Second Temple Period varied in their numeration of the Decalogue. For a representation of views, see James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 382-386. Some sources saw Exod 20:2 as the first commandment, while others held to Exod 20:3-6 as the first.

not, a reader today is presented with it, and is given the opportunity to consider the merits of beginning the Decalogue with Exod 20:2 or 20:3.

5.2.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The *Mekhilta*'s two interpretations view the relationship between Exod 20:2 and 20:3 in a similar way to many of the evangelical commentators,⁸⁸⁵ all of whom see Exod 20:2 as describing God's right to impose commandments and 20:3 as articulating the first commandment. Its interpretive method, however, is completely distinct. Not all of the evangelical commentators identify a specific method behind their interpretation, but of those who do, many engage in historical critical analysis, and determine that the Sinai covenant is modeled after a suzerain vassal treaty. Such treaties begin with a historical prologue, which describes the relationship between the two parties entering into a covenant, and explains why one party has the right to impose stipulations on the other party. These evangelical commentators identify Exod 20:2 as the Sinai covenant's historical prologue.⁸⁸⁶

As noted before in this dissertation, the rabbis did not possess a historical consciousness in the way the evangelical commentators do. Scouring the ancient Near East for interpretive clues would not have occurred to the rabbis. Needless to say, they

⁸⁸⁵ Alexander, 96-100, 104-105; Ashby, 88; Bailey, 209, 218, 479; Bruckner, 170-173, 180-182; Carpenter, *Exodus 1-18*, 27; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 12-13, 38; Dozeman, 415-416, 424-426, 438-447, 474; Enns, 411-412; Garrett, 54, 139-141, 459-460, 469, 473; Gilbert and Stallman, 40; Gowan, 175-177, 182, 187; Harman, 205, 212, 214; Hamilton, 328; J. Janzen, 132-136, 142-143; W. Janzen, 26, 237-239, 250, 254-255; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 195-201, 397-410; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 41-45; Larsson, 128-129, 138-141, 142; Mackay, 10, 322, 338-339; Motyer, 195-201, 213, n. 2, 214-216, 220-221, n. 17; Pokrifka, 215-216; Roper, 315-316, 322; Ryken, 457, 484, 495-498, 518; Scarlata, 148; Stuart, 446-447; Wendland, 120-121; Wiersbe, 102-103, 107-108.

⁸⁸⁶ Ashby, 82-83; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32; Currid, 36; Hamilton, 32; Harman, 211-212; Mackay, 322, 340; Page, 80; Pokrifka 206, 215; Roper, 322; Scarlata, 150, 152; Stuart, 439-440.

also did not have access to the relevant sources from the ANE. Rather than engaging in historical criticism, the *Mekhilta* offers a parable in the first interpretation and turns to the method of *gezerah shavah* in the second. The closest analogue to *gezerah shavah* among the evangelical commentators is grammatical exegesis. For example, in his attempt to determine the meaning of *עַל פְּנֵי* in Exod 20:3, Stuart examines the appearance of the construction and variations of it across the Hebrew Bible.⁸⁸⁷ By examining the occurrence of *עַל פְּנֵי* in other contexts, Stuart is able to establish its semantic range, and from that, narrow the range of possible meanings of *עַל פְּנֵי* in Exod 20:3. The *gezerah shavah* method in the R. Ishmael midrashim also seeks out identical words or phrases in other contexts. However, the use of *gezerah shavah* is warranted only on account of a redundancy of the word or phrase. In addition, the *gezerah shavah* creates a link between two texts in which the meaning from one text is brought to bear on the meaning of another text. This has the potential to create multiple interpretive possibilities.

In our case, the link that is established between Exod 20:2-3 and Lev 18:2-3 has at least two implications: that *all* of Torah was given at Sinai and Israel was polytheistic while in Egypt. Both implications are worthy of further consideration for an evangelical. With the former, there is a common belief among the Christian commentators that only the Decalogue was revealed at Sinai, or only the Decalogue was spoken directly by God to Israel, which gives it a unique status over the other legal material.⁸⁸⁸ To say all of Torah was revealed at Sinai would grate against what many evangelical scholars have

⁸⁸⁷ Stuart 448-449. Other evangelical commentators also engage in a similar approach: Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 39; Garrett 470, no. 1; Hamilton, 322; W. Janzen, 254; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 28; Larsson, 143; Roper, 322-323.

⁸⁸⁸ E.g., Alexander, 101, 104-105; Augustine, *spir. et litt.* 14,23-24, 26; and 16,28; Bailey, 214; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32, 34; Currid, 35; Fretheim, 220-221; Hamilton, 315; Harman, 213; Motyer, 211-213; Wendland, 120

determined about the legal material's slow development over history.⁸⁸⁹ In considering potential truth in the idea that all of Torah was given at Sinai, an evangelical need not ignore what he/she knows to be historically accurate. Rather, the idea can expose subtle ways in which one might privilege certain parts of the legal material over others, depending on how that material was received or developed. This affords an opportunity to consider the ways in which historical analysis can lead to "a canon within a canon," or a belief that some material (e.g., the Decalogue) is more relevant or even revelatory than others (the rest of the laws of Torah), because of its pedigree.

With the latter, the idea that Israel was idolatrous in Egypt is a minority view among the evangelical commentators.⁸⁹⁰ Entertaining this possibility may lend new insight into Exodus, the nature of God's relationship with Israel, and the necessity of grace. For example, perhaps the plagues were not simply proof to Egypt that God alone was master of the universe, but were proof to Israel as well, which had heretofore turned to the Egyptian gods for strength and comfort. Seen in this way, the exodus story shows that grace operates in the Hebrew Bible similarly to the way it does in the NT: while they were still sinners, God came, nonetheless, to rescue them.

Before moving to the next midrash, a word should be said about the numeration of the Decalogue. There is a strong reflex within Christianity to choose only one numeration of the Decalogue from all of the options. This can be seen in both Augustine and the evangelical commentators, who also promote and rely on one numeration of the Decalogue each. Some commentators even argue why their numeration is superior. For

⁸⁸⁹ E.g., Ashby, 83; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 33; Dozeman, 469-470. Even a literal reading of the text would likely have difficulty with explaining how the *entire* Torah was revealed at Sinai.

⁸⁹⁰ Ryken, 518.

example, Augustine believes his numeration is preferable, because it allows each of the first three commandments to correspond to one member of the Trinity. In addition, he argues that not only is the commandment to worship one God most fully elaborated when it includes the prohibition on idolatry, but the language of Exod 20:4-5 flows most naturally as an explanation of Exod 20:3.⁸⁹¹ Among the evangelical commentators, Garrett emphatically argues that Exod 20:2 is not a commandment. While Jewish tradition understands v. 2 as a commandment to believe in God, Garrett argues that “belief is simply assumed.”⁸⁹² The point of v. 2, Garrett states, is to convey introductory information about the Decalogue. The *Mekhilta*’s preservation of different numerations of the Decalogue offers a useful alternative to these Christian approaches. Here, one is given an opportunity to consider the merits and deficiencies of various numerations. The *Mekhilta* also communicates in its presentation the reality that if an interpreter were to choose one numeration over the others, he/she would lose the merits and interpretive possibilities of the others. One might be tempted with the *Mekhilta* and the evangelical commentators to juxtapose every possibility, and then select the one that has the greatest strengths. Rather than doing this, I suggest an interpreter might allow the tensions between each approach to remain. Perhaps in doing so, one may discover a way in which each numeration can coexist, or one may find space in which all of them can be preserved, as each is important in its own way. At the very least, one is given an opportunity to consider, at least for a while longer, each numeration, which may ultimately lead to gravitating toward one that had not been considered before.

⁸⁹¹ *Qu. hept. Ex. 71*. See also Fretheim, 225-226.

⁸⁹² Garrett, 473.

5.3 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* B.3

Other Gods. But are they gods? Has it not been said: “And have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods” (Isa. 37.19)? What then does Scripture mean when it says: “Other gods⁸⁹³”? Merely those which others called gods. Another interpretation is: Gods that are backward (*Aharim*).⁸⁹⁴ For they hold back the coming of goodness into the world.⁸⁹⁵ Another Interpretation: *Other Gods*. Who turn those who worship them into others.⁸⁹⁶ Another Interpretation: *Other Gods*. Who act like strangers⁸⁹⁷ towards those who worship them.⁸⁹⁸ And thus it says: “Yea, though one cry⁸⁹⁹ unto him, he cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble⁹⁰⁰” (Isa. 46.7).

From the outset, the *Mekhilta* states clearly the potential issue it sees with the commandment. The biblical text reads לֹא-יִהְיֶה לָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל-פְּנֵי. A very literal

⁸⁹³ The Oxford and Munich manuscripts have אחרים (others) instead of אלהים אחרים (other gods). This puts the focus more on the reason for אחרים (others), instead of אלהים (gods), which emphasizes *others* in the midrash’s answer: “Merely those which *others* called gods.” Emphasis mine.

⁸⁹⁴ Lauterbach takes אלהים אחרים, not as the biblical quotation (which would be translated “other gods”), but as part of the interpretation (gods that are backwards). The parallel structures in what follows suggests that this is not necessary.

⁸⁹⁵ The Oxford manuscript lacks מלכודת מלכודת את הטובה (another interpretation: Gods that are backward [*Aharim*]). For they hold back the coming of goodness into the world), which could simply be a scribal error of skipping from one דבר אחר to the next.

⁸⁹⁶ The Oxford manuscript, the Munich manuscript, and the printed editions have שהם עושין את אלהיהם אחרונים, rendering the line: “They make their gods last.” Following *Yalqut Shimoni*, *Midrash Hakhamim*, *Sefer Ot Emet*, R. Moses Frankfort’s corrections in his commentary to the *Mekilta*, and *Efat Zedek*, Lauterbach has עובדיהם אחרים instead of אלהיהם אחרונים, which renders the line שהם עושין את עובדיהם אחרים (Who turn those who worship them into others). The Horowitz-Rabin edition also has שהם עושין את עובדיהם אחרים. The reason for the emendation is that the Oxford manuscript, Munich manuscript, and printed editions’ version do not make sense. The word אחרים could be understood as “heretics,” like Elisha b. Abuyah, who was known as אחר. If this is correct, then Lauterbach, et al. and the Horowitz-Rabin edition should be taken to mean “they turn those who worship them into heretics.” See footnote 906.

⁸⁹⁷ Lauterbach translates אחרים as “strangers.” Another possibility is to take אחרים as a euphemism for idolatry. See Jastrow, 41. This would render the line, “They are idolatry for those who worship them.”

⁸⁹⁸ Instead of אחרים לעובדיהם (strangers towards those who worship them), the Oxford and Munich manuscripts and the Constantinople edition have אחרונים לעובדיהם, which can be translated as “[they are] last to those who worship them.” In other words, they are worthless. This meaning is consistent with what these textual witnesses have in footnote 896.

⁸⁹⁹ The MT has אִם-יִצְעַק (“if one cries”). The printed editions substitute והן for אִם before יצעק, rendering the Isaiah quote, “and behold, though one cry unto.” Meanwhile, the Oxford Manuscript, the Horowitz-Rabin edition, and *Midrash Hakhamim* have הֵן יִצְעַק (behold, though one cry unto). The substitution of והן or הֵן gives emphasis to the desperation.

⁹⁰⁰ The MT has מִצָּרָתוֹ (from his trouble), instead of וּמִצָּרָתוֹ (nor from his trouble). The Horowitz-Rabin edition follows the MT, despite having a variation from the MT with הֵן יִצְעַק. See footnote 899.

translation of the text would be “there will not be for you other gods before my face.”

The world of the *Mekhilta* is a Greco-Roman context, in which there exist *many* gods.⁹⁰¹

In light of this, the commandment, in a plain sense, seems to unambiguously acknowledge that there are indeed *other gods*. The *Mekhilta* thus poses the question, “But are they gods?” Is it indeed possible that other gods do exist, and that the Bible acknowledges this? The *Mekhilta*’s answer is unequivocally in the negative. No one is on par with God or could be categorized as a “god.” The midrash cites Isa 37:19 as support for its theological claim.⁹⁰² Whether in context or not, the Isaiah verse proves the *Mekhilta*’s point: any god other than the God of Israel is not really a god at all. It is merely an idol or a figment of the mind; thus, it can be extinguished or physically destroyed. Since this is the case, then “what then does Scripture mean when it says: ‘Other gods’”? The *Mekhilta* proceeds to offer nine reasons, the first four of which I will discuss here.

⁹⁰¹ At least some Jews during the time of the *Mekhilta* were possibly worshiping other gods, either in addition to or in place of the God of Israel. See footnote 970. This issue may have been similar to what various ancient Israelites communities had to face. The ANE world was filled with many gods, as well. If monotheism was a slow development, the ancient Israelite inheritors of the Decalogue would also have had to explain the language of Exod 20:3.

⁹⁰² The context of the biblical text is the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians. Hezekiah, king of Judah, has just received a letter from Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, informing him that even the God of Israel will not save him. Sennacherib knows this because no other god of any nation that Assyria conquered saved his nation. Hezekiah goes to the Temple to pray to God for aid. He begins by articulating his monotheistic theology: “O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth” (Isa 37:16). Hezekiah then acknowledges in his prayer that Sennacherib is right in saying that no god was able to save his nation, but the reason, Hezekiah states, is because these gods are false. Indeed, Sennacherib can throw other nations’ “gods into the fire,” because “they were no gods, but the work of human hands—wood and stone—and so they were destroyed” (Isa 37:19). In an effort to encourage God to act, Hezekiah implies that if God does not, God’s reputation will be at stake. Sennacherib will believe that God is like any other “god.” But if God does act, all the world will know who God is. The conclusion of the story is found in Isa 37:36-38. God does act, killing one hundred eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army. This leads to Sennacherib’s withdrawal. Upon returning to his home in Nineveh, his sons assassinate him while he is worshiping the god Nisroch. This sequence of events proves that God alone is God, for out of all the nations Sennacherib attacked, only Judah remained.

According to the first response, the meaning of אלהים אחרים is “Merely those which others called gods.” Rather than reading אחרים as an adjective of אלהים, which would render the text “other gods,” the midrash reads both אחרים and אלהים as nouns, rendering אחרים as other people (i.e., idolaters), and אלהים as essentially false gods. Thus, it is able to interpret אלהים אחרים to mean “Merely those which others called gods.” The correct way, then, to read the commandment is: “You shall not have those whom others call gods before me.” In effect, the commandment forbids following those whom others call “gods,” while simultaneously denying that any other god exists beyond the God of Israel.

The second reading is דבר אחר אלהים אחרים שהם מאחרים את הטובה מלבוא לעולם. Lauterbach translates this as “Another interpretation is: Gods that are backward (*Aḥarim*). For they hold back⁹⁰³ the coming of goodness into the world.”⁹⁰⁴ Unlike the previous response, which took אחרים as a noun, this midrash takes אחרים as a verb,⁹⁰⁵ rendering אלהים אחרים to mean “gods who hold back.” These “gods,” the midrash states, are of no benefit, not only to Israel, but to the entire world. In fact, they hold back goodness from entering into the world. The second response, then, reads the commandment as, “You shall not put before you [i.e., submit to] ‘gods’ who hold back before me.” The commandment, in this way, is about bringing goodness into the world, and devoting

⁹⁰³ The midrash reads אחרים not as an adjective, which is often translated in Exod 20:3 as “other,” but as a Piel verb, which can be translated as “to hold back,” or “to (cause to) tarry.” Lauterbach chooses “to hold back”; though, “tarry” may be more appropriate, since goodness is held back, but only for a limited time. Ultimately, God triumphs. Such a view is consistent with Isaiah 37.

⁹⁰⁴ Lauterbach takes אלהים אחרים to be part of the interpretation (see footnote 894), translating אחרים as “backwards.” While this is possible, the *Mekhilta* could be seen as creating a pattern with this response and the next two, where each of them begins with דבר אחר (another interpretation), followed by a quotation from Exod 20:3: אלהים אחרים (*other gods*). If the *Mekhilta* is creating such a pattern, then the second response should be translated as, “Another interpretation: *other gods*. For they hold back the coming of goodness into the world.”

⁹⁰⁵ The Piel verb is best seen as a participle (מאחרים) with a relative function.

oneself to the one God who will make this happen. All other “gods” may appear to generate goodness, but in actuality, they do the exact opposite.

The third response highlights the *effect* polytheism will have on a person. The text states, “Another Interpretation: *Other Gods*. Who turn those who worship them into others.” The midrash understands אחרים as a noun modifying לך (to/for you), not אלהים, in Exod 20:3. In effect, those who commit polytheism would become אחרים. The commandment, then, seeks to prevent this from happening. Lauterbach translates אחרים as “others.” This potentially leaves broad possibilities for application, as “others” could be applied to all sorts of entities or objects of devotion. However, following Reuven Hammer, the meaning of “others” is likely more constrained, referring here to “heretics.”⁹⁰⁶ The third response, then, states that the worship of other gods turns people into heretics. The euphemism of “others,” though, helps convey the distance and alienation that is created when one turns to idolatry.

The fourth response puts front and center the futility of worshiping other “gods.” The text states, “Who act like strangers towards those who worship them. And thus it says: ‘Yea, though one cry unto him, he cannot answer, nor save him out of his trouble’ (Isa. 46:7).” According to Lauterbach, the fourth response takes אחרים to mean “stranger,” instead of “other.” The midrash then makes use of the Isaiah citation, which states that these “gods” can neither speak nor help a person; they are utterly impotent.⁹⁰⁷ In Isaiah’s

⁹⁰⁶ See Reuven Hammer, trans., *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 92 on a parallel to this midrash. Hammer translates אחרים as “heretics.” The term אחר is the name given to a specific “heretic,” Elisha b. Abuyah, in y. *Hagigah* 2:1 [77b]. See footnote 1024.

⁹⁰⁷ The context of Isa 46:7 is a speech by God, describing the useless nature of the Babylonian gods. No one can compare with the God of Israel. God states that gods of silver and gold are just that—silver and gold. Those who worship these “gods” end up looking after these gods, instead of the other way around. They must carry these gods from place to place; otherwise, the gods will not move. The one who cries out to these gods will hear nothing in response.

own understanding, these “gods” are human inventions. In light of the Isaiah context, the midrash appears to be pressing the point that these “other gods” really are *other*. In a sense, as Lauterbach states, they are “strangers” to those who worship them. But the point really seems to be that they are *not* God, which means that they lack the critical qualities God possesses—the ability to listen, speak, act. They cannot do what God is capable of by virtue of the fact that they are *other*. Thus, one’s worship or devotion to them is completely futile. These “other” gods *estrangle* those who worship them.

5.3.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

When it comes to the question of the existence of other gods, the evangelical commentators frequently turn to historical criticism, and the debate over whether Israel was monotheistic or henotheistic. The most popular view is that Israel was monotheistic: the commandment in Exod 20:3 denies the existence of other gods, and Israel’s ideal has been to remain steadfast in that direction.⁹⁰⁸ One prominent method in confirming Israel’s monotheistic theology is the canonical approach. Hamilton, for example, points to Deut 4:35, 39; Isa 45:14, 18, 21-22; 46:9 to show that Exod 20:3 denies the existence of other gods.⁹⁰⁹ Those who believe Israel was henotheistic argue that Exod 20:3 does not deny that other gods exist, but demands exclusive loyalty to God alone.⁹¹⁰ Interestingly, a canonical approach is also employed to support henotheism. Dozeman, for example,

⁹⁰⁸ Ashby, 88; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 38-39; Currid, 37, 43; Gilbert and Stallman, 40-41, 43-45; Hamilton, 328-329; Harman, 214-215; J. Janzen, 143-144; W. Janzen, 280-281; Larsson, 143-144; Mackay, 343-344; Motyer, 222-223; Page, 81, 83; Pokrifka, 217-218; Roper, 322; Ryken, 512-526; Scarlata, 159; Stuart 448-449; Wiersbe, 109-110.

⁹⁰⁹ Hamilton, 329.

⁹¹⁰ Coggins, 78; Dozeman, 480-481; Enns, 413-414; Fretheim, 224-225;

points to Deut 8:19; 13:2, 7, 13; 17:3; 18:20; 29:26 as confirmation that Israel was henotheistic.

As noted in the chapter two and B.1, the rabbis did not possess a historical consciousness, such that they would have attempted a critical investigation of the ANE culture.⁹¹¹ But in its effort to confirm Israel’s monotheism, the *Mekhilta* turns to Isa 37:19 and its denial of the existence of other gods—in an approach that has strong resonance with a canonical method. Hamilton and the *Mekhilta*, in this instance, form a strong parity. With its monotheistic position now firmly established, the *Mekhilta* creatively engages the phrase אלהים אחרים in Exod 20:3 beyond its simple meaning. By playing with the vowels, semantic range, and syntax, the *Mekhilta* is able to read אחרים as idolaters, strangers, or even as an act of holding back. These alternative meanings have strong resonances with several contemporary evangelical applications of the commandment. Notable among the evangelical interpretations are the following: Stuart argues the “other gods” the commandment prohibits worship of are “supernatural beings” (e.g., angels)⁹¹²; Ashby believes the commandment is designed to direct one to put God first in one’s life⁹¹³; Pokrifka states its aim is to prevent devotion to money, political leaders, etc.⁹¹⁴; W. Janzen argues the commandment is against “philosophies, ideologies, material possessions, and goals, or anything that may claim our total allegiance, devotion or effort,” including other religious traditions⁹¹⁵; J. Janzen states that the commandment prohibits devotion to any ultimate power that one believes can effect change.⁹¹⁶ The

⁹¹¹ See pp. 152 and 280ff.

⁹¹² Stuart, 449.

⁹¹³ Ashby, 88.

⁹¹⁴ Pokrifka, 217-218.

⁹¹⁵ W. Janzen, 280.

⁹¹⁶ J. Janzen, 143-144.

Mekhilta's alternatives fit in nicely with this list, offering more possibilities and nuance to what these evangelical commentators have articulated. The *Mekhilta*'s first response prohibits association with polytheists in the context of worship, which brings concrete specificity to W. Janzen's warning about devotion to other religious traditions. The *Mekhilta*'s second response prohibits association with forces that hold back goodness from coming into the world, which identifies the darker side of J. Janzen's interpretation about devotion to ultimate powers that can effect change. The *Mekhilta*'s third response warns that polytheism turns people into "others" (i.e., heretics), creating a distance and alienation that is implied in the evangelical commentary, but spelled out more vividly in the *Mekhilta*. The *Mekhilta*'s fourth response reveals the futility of worshiping other gods, which articulates more fully what Pokrifka and J. Janzen hint at in their comments about devotion to money, political leaders, philosophies, etc.

Both the evangelical interpretations and the *Mekhilta* also align well with Augustine's understanding of the commandment. Augustine argues that the commandment prohibits all images of God, because the only way one can truly "see" God is with the intellect. In other words, truly "seeing" God means understanding God perfectly.⁹¹⁷ The interpretations of the evangelical commentators and the *Mekhilta* provide ways through which one can properly understand God, helping one determine what is of God and what is not. But what the *Mekhilta* does that most of the Christian commentators do not is derive its interpretations wholly from an intense exegetical engagement with the vowels, semantic range, and syntax of Exod 20:3. Each one of the *Mekhilta*'s interpretations finds meaning through a creative reading of אלהים אחרים. This

⁹¹⁷ Ep. 55.

does not necessarily make the *Mekhilta*'s interpretations more accurate or true, but what it does do is require a far more vigorous and sustained concentration on the biblical text than what is found in most of evangelical contemporary applications. To be sure, attention to the text at this level is not completely absent in the evangelical commentary. Stuart shows that אלהים אחרים can mean "supernatural beings." But it is the unrelenting, creative focus on the words and syntax of the biblical text that distinguishes the *Mekhilta*. For an evangelical who views Scripture as the highest authority and desires all of his/her actions to be biblically-based, the *Mekhilta*'s approach to the text offers a unique way of interpreting the text that can both generate new meaning and more intimately bind one's beliefs and actions to the text.

5.4 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* B.5

*Thou Shalt Not Make unto Thee a Graven Image.*⁹¹⁸ He shall not make one that is engraven. But perhaps he may make one that is solid?⁹¹⁹ Scripture says: "Nor any manner of likeness." He shall not make a solid one. But perhaps he may plant a plant as an idol for himself? Scripture says: "Thou shalt not plant thee an Asherah" (Deut. 16.21). He shall not plant a plant for an idol to himself. But perhaps he may make an idol of a tree? Scripture says: "Of any kind of tree" (ibid.). He shall not make an idol of a tree. But perhaps he may make one of stone? Scripture says: "Neither shall ye place any figured stone," etc. (Lev. 26.1). He shall not make an idol of

⁹¹⁸ After לא תעשה לך פסל (you will not make for yourself an idol), the Horowitz-Rabin edition adds יכול (I might think), which conforms this midrash to a similar formula in the *Mekhilta*, the שומע אני (I might think). See Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 39-46. Yadin observes that the יכול construction, based on its appearances, is *Sifra*'s characteristic construction, while שומע אני is the *Mekhilta*'s. Stemmerger observes that the Oxford manuscript, and to a lesser degree other manuscripts and the Genizah fragments, often lacks the יכול, while the printed editions have יכול far more frequently. Stemmerger concludes that this difference, along with several others that he has identified, indicate an effort toward standardization in each textual witness and distinct traditions of redaction, both chronologically and between different redactors. See Stemmerger, "Mekhilta de'R. Ishmael," 469.

⁹¹⁹ A better translation for "one that is solid" may be "picture." See footnote 932.

stone. But perhaps he may make one of silver or of gold⁹²⁰? Scripture says: “Gods of silver or gods of gold ye shall not make unto you” (Ex. 20.20). He shall not make an idol of silver or of gold.⁹²¹ But perhaps he may make one of copper, iron, tin, or lead? Scripture says: “Nor make to yourselves⁹²² molten gods” (Lev. 19.4). He shall not make for himself any of these images. But perhaps he may make an image of any figure? Scripture says: “Lest ye deal corruptly, and make you⁹²³ a graven image, even the form of any figure” (Deut. 4.16). He shall not make an image of any figure. But perhaps he may make an image of cattle, or fowl? Scripture says: “The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl” (ibid. v. 17). He shall not make an image of any of these. But perhaps he may make an image of fish, locust, unclean animals, or reptiles? Scripture says: “The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water” (ibid., v. 18). He shall not make an image of any of these. But perhaps he may make an image of the sun, the moon, the stars, or the planets? Scripture says: “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven,” etc. (ibid., v. 19). He shall not make an image of any of these. But perhaps he may make an image of the angels, the Cherubim or the *Ophannim*?⁹²⁴ Scripture says: “Of anything that is in heaven.” As for “that is in heaven,” one might think it refers only to sun, moon, stars, and planets? But it says: “Above,” meaning, not the image of the angels, not the image of the Cherubim, and not the image of the *Ophannim*. He shall not make an image of any of these. But perhaps he may make an image of the deeps and the darkness?⁹²⁵ Scripture says: “All that is in the water under the earth.” This includes even the reflected image—these are the words of R. Akiba. Some say: It includes the

⁹²⁰ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks ושל זהב (and of gold). See footnote 921 for more on this.

⁹²¹ Instead of אלהי כסף ואלהי זהב לא תעשו לכם לא יעשה לו של כסף ושל זהב (Gods of silver or gods of gold ye shall not make unto you” (Ex. 20.20). He shall not make an idol of silver or of gold), the Horowitz-Rabin edition has אלהי כסף לא יעשה לו של זהב ואלהי זהב לא יעשה לו של זהב (gods of silver. he will not make for himself of silver. But he will make for himself of gold. Scripture says: “and gods of gold.” He will not make for himself of gold”). By focusing on silver and gold individually, the Horowitz-Rabin edition adds emphasis to both. It also takes into account the repetition of language in Exod 20:3: אלהי כסף ואלהי זהב (gods of silver and gods of gold).

⁹²² The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks לכם (for yourselves). The MT includes לכם.

⁹²³ The Oxford manuscript lacks לכם (for yourself). The MT includes לכם.

⁹²⁴ The printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition add וחשמלים (*Hashmalim*, or glittering substances) after ואופנים (and the *Ophannim*).

⁹²⁵ The Munich manuscript and the Horowitz-Rabin edition add ואפלה (and the dark places) after וחשך (and the darkness). Meanwhile, the Oxford manuscript and the *Yalqut* manuscripts to the Pentateuch (Oxford 2637) add והברה (and the outside or outer place or the hollowed-out place) after וחשך. This expands the landscape.

*Shabrira*⁹²⁶—Scripture⁹²⁷ goes to such length in pursuit of the evil inclination to idolatry⁹²⁸ in order not to leave room⁹²⁹ for any pretext of permitting it.

This midrash focuses on Exod 20:4: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.” This commandment systematically prohibits the creation of an idol modeled after anything in heaven (which includes God), on the earth, or under the earth. The *Mekhilta*, at first glance, appears to follow a standard rabbinic move—to add specificity to vagueness. The commandment itself does not state *precisely* what is included in its prohibition of idol-making (it only describes general locations), and so the *Mekhilta* proceeds to provide specificity. Upon closer examination, though, the *Mekhilta* greatly expands the scope of the commandment to include much more than idol-making. To understand the *Mekhilta*’s interpretation, it will be helpful to break down its midrash into parts. The midrash can be divided into four sections:

<i>Subsection</i>	<i>Prohibition</i>	<i>Citation</i>
Section 1: Prohibited Artistic Modes (פסל)		
1.1	גלופה – engravings	Exod 20:4
1.2	אטומה – picture	Exod 20:4
1.3	מטע – plant	Deut 16:21
Section 2: Prohibited Artistic Materials		
2.1	עץ – wood (or tree)	Deut 16:21

⁹²⁶ The Oxford manuscript has הסודירוס (or possibly a misspelling of הסורירוס) instead of השברירם (the *Shabrira*). Meanwhile, the Munich manuscript has הסוריריס, and the *Yalqut* manuscripts to the Pentateuch (Oxford 2637) has הסורירוס חוספות. The variations in spelling suggests that this was a foreign word that was not understood, and was thus subject to corruptions during transmissions. The Horowitz Rabin edition points to the *Arukh*, a medieval dictionary, which indicates that the word comes from Persian and means חיות מבריקות בים (light-giving creatures in the sea).

⁹²⁷ The Oxford manuscript lacks הכתוב (Scripture). The printed editions have הקדוש ברוך הוא (the Holy One, blessed be He) instead of הכתוב.

⁹²⁸ Lauterbach adds “to idolatry” in his translation, which is not present in the Hebrew text. In the R. Ishmael midrashim, there is no special “evil inclination to idolatry.” There is a general evil inclination. See the discussion below on the evil inclination. However, in the context of our present midrash, the evil inclination’s goal is to lead one to commit idolatry.

⁹²⁹ The printed editions add פתחון פה (an excuse) after ליתן (to leave room), smoothing the text out more.

2.2	אבן – stone	Lev 26:1
2.3	כסף – silver זהב – gold	Exod 20:23 ⁹³⁰
2.4	נחשת – copper ברזל – iron בדיל – tin עופרת – lead	Lev 19:4
Section 3: Prohibited Images		
3.1	סמל – figure	Deut 4:16
3.2	בהמה – cattle (domesticated animals) חיה – animal (non-domesticated) עוף – fowl	Deut 4:17
3.3	דג – fish חגב – locust שקץ – unclean animals רומש – reptiles	Deut 4:18
3.4	חמה – sun לבנה – moon כוכב – star מזל – planet	Deut 4:19
3.5	מלאך – angel כרוב – cherub אופנים – <i>Ophannim</i>	Exod 20:4
3.6	תהום – the deep חשך – darkness	Exod 20:4
3.7	בוביא – reflected image שברירי – <i>Shabriri</i>	
Section 4: Conclusion		

The first section prohibits certain artistic modes, focusing first on the meaning of פֶּסֶל from Exod 20:4. It takes פֶּסֶל to mean גלופה (engraving); that is, a human-made three-dimensional object.⁹³¹ The midrash then poses the possibility that one might find an exception. Indeed, engravings are prohibited, but this does not necessarily include אטומה (painting).⁹³² Perhaps paintings can be made. However, scripture, in Exod 20:4, responds

⁹³⁰ Lauterbach's text mistakenly lists Exod 20:20 as the citation.

⁹³¹ While פֶּסֶל meant idol more generally in biblical Hebrew, it takes on a more specific meaning of "graven image" in rabbinic Hebrew. See Jastrow, 1198. The word גלופה is a Qal passive participle of גלף, which means "to engrave."

⁹³² The word אטומה is obscure. Lauterbach translates it as "one that is solid." The word אטומה is a Qal feminine passive participle of אטם ("to be filled"). See Jastrow, 43. The Horowitz-Rabin edition lists

with כָּל־תְּמוּנָה. While תְּמוּנָה can mean “likeness” in biblical Hebrew (which is the choice the KJV makes), it can also mean “form.” “Form” or “shape” is the primary meaning the word takes on in rabbinic Hebrew.⁹³³ So, when the midrash reads כָּל־תְּמוּנָה, it understands the phrase to mean “any shape” or “any form.” Thus, the making of paintings, which necessitate shapes or forms, are also excluded. The impetus of our present midrash is the ambiguity of the ו between פָּסֵל and כָּל־תְּמוּנָה in Exod 20:4. Does the ו mark כָּל־תְּמוּנָה as distinct from פָּסֵל or part of the description of פָּסֵל? Translations like the NRSV take the latter route (“You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven...”), while those like the KJV and NJPS take the former (“Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven...”). Our midrash also takes the former, designating each as a separate prohibition: the making of graven images (פָּסֵל) or (ו) paintings (כָּל־תְּמוּנָה).

Our midrash then goes on to point out another possible exception: if one looks closely, only the *making* (עֲשֵׂה) of objects is prohibited in Exod 20:4. The commandment says nothing of planting (נָטַע) a plant as an idol. Making and planting are distinct actions. Scripture, however, rules out planting, as well, with Deut. 16:21.⁹³⁴

other possibilities (224, n. 12). In the *Zayit Ra'anan*, a brief commentary of the *Yalqut Shimoni*, likely authored by R. Abraham Gombiner (1635-1682), גְּלוּפָה is “carved into a form/shape,” while אֲטוּמָה is “with no limbs cut off.” According to R. Meir HaKohen (late 13th c. CE) in his *Hagahot Maimoniot*, a commentary on Maimonides’ *Mishneh Torah*, גְּלוּפָה is a “form/shape that sticks out” and אֲטוּמָה is a “form that is sunken in.” The Horowitz-Rabin edition prefers R. Gombiner’s gloss; the meaning is still obscure, though. The midrash is operating in such a way that it is searching for exceptions. If פָּסֵל is a three-dimensional object, and if גְּלוּפָה is an engraving, then it follows that אֲטוּמָה must be some sort of exception. Since engravings are carved into a surface, אֲטוּמָה could be a surface without carvings, such as a painting.

⁹³³ See Jastrow, 1676.

⁹³⁴ The context of Deut 16:21 is a minor section, embedded within a longer section on juridical procedures, concerning proper Israelite religious practices. One is not to do as the Canaanites do, planting trees as Asherahs next to altars for God, or setting up stone pillars. The Israelites appear to have thought of the Asherah as a cult object made of wood (though, some scholars argue the Asherah was a tree). Asherah herself was understood as Baal’s consort. See Sung Jin Park, “The Cultic Identity of Asherah in Deuteronomistic Ideology of Israel,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 123:4 (2011): 553-564.

In its plain sense, Exod 20:4 only prohibits the making of graven images or any form *for the purpose of idolatry*. One could argue that our midrash adopts the same specificity, which would mean that graven images, engravings, and paintings could be made for non-idolatrous purposes. However, if section one is read in conjunction with section three, which prohibits images for any reason, and section four, which argues that Scripture goes to great lengths to steer one from ever committing idolatry, it becomes clear that section one bans the making of graven images, engravings, and paintings *for any purpose whatsoever*.⁹³⁵

Section one, along with sections two and three, follows a specific pattern: a possibility is introduced, but then is rejected by invoking Scripture. This pattern is similar to the *שומע אני* (I might think) formula.⁹³⁶ The *שומע אני* formula typically offers interpretations that seem very much within the realm of possibility; however, these interpretations are rejected, usually because of another scriptural passage from another part of the Bible, which is introduced by *תלמוד לומר* (Scripture says). This second biblical text often requires no midrashic explanation; its very presence precludes the proposed reading. The mechanics of the *שומע אני* formula appears to be at work in our present midrash, despite the fact the phrase *שומע אני* is not explicitly employed.⁹³⁷

Section two lists a series of materials: wood (*עץ*), stone (*אבן*), silver (*כסף*), gold

In our midrash, the *Mekhila* understands the Asherah to be an actual tree— but one that is planted for the purpose of an idolatrous cult.

⁹³⁵ The archaeological evidence from the centuries after the *Mekhila*'s redaction indicate that the *Mekhila*'s comprehensive ban on images was not adopted, at least not widely. For more on Jewish art during this era, see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also the excurses at the end of this section on art in synagogues during the amoraic period.

⁹³⁶ See footnote 918. See also Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 39-46.

⁹³⁷ That is, in Lauterbach's edition. However, *יכול* (I might think), which is similar to *שומע אני*, does appear at the beginning of our midrash in the Horowitz-Rabin edition. This would make our midrash conform more closely to the pattern of *שומע אני*. See footnote 918.

(זהב), copper (נחשת), iron (ברזל), tin (בדיל), and lead (עופרת). The midrash prohibits making idols with any of these materials. Wood is rejected because of Deut 16:21.⁹³⁸ Stone is rejected because of Lev 26:1.⁹³⁹ Silver and gold are rejected because of Exod 20:23.⁹⁴⁰ Finally, copper, iron, tin, and lead are rejected because of Lev 19:4.⁹⁴¹ The list is comprehensive, identifying those materials that one would typically consider using in the construction of an idol in this period.

Section three shifts away from the previous two sections, moving from the topics of modes and materials to דמות (images or resemblances). The section begins with the statement לא יעשה לו דמות כל אלה (he shall not make for himself any of these images). This line serves as a refrain, appearing at the end of each subsection, weaving together a comprehensive ban on images.⁹⁴² After each appearance of the refrain, the midrash engages in an implied אני שומע-type formula, proposing the possibility that an image/resemblance can be made of a certain object, only to reject the possibility with a scriptural passage. This אני שומע-type formula is employed seven times. The first four

⁹³⁸ See footnote 934. Here, Deut 16:21—לא תטע לך אשרה כל עץ—is read “you will not plant a sacred tree [אשרה] of any sort [כל עץ].”

⁹³⁹ The verse Lev 26:1 states תתנו בארצכם להשתחוות עליה. The NJPS translates this as, “or place figured stones in your land to worship upon.” Carved stones that are worshiped upon (i.e., used as surfaces upon which one bows down or prostrates oneself) are prohibited. This prohibition was especially relevant in the Temple or in synagogues with stone floors.

⁹⁴⁰ This text appears after the conclusion of the giving of the Decalogue. God conveys to Moses certain cultic practices that Israel must follow, the first one being to not make gods of silver or gold.

⁹⁴¹ Leviticus 19:4 appears among a series of laws, many of which parallel the Decalogue. Preceding Lev 19:4 is a commandment to revere one’s father and mother, followed by a commandment to keep the Sabbath. The commandment in Lev 19:4 states לא תעשו לכם אל-הָאֱלִילִים, וְאֱלֹהֵי מַסֵּכָה, (“Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves”). The word מַסֵּכָה can be translated as “cast images” or also “molten metal.” For an idol to be made of metal, the metal must undergo a smelting process. Essentially, Lev 19:4 is saying that any idol made of metal (i.e., metal that was melted) is prohibited. What is perhaps not specifically identified is hammered metal in thin sheets. One might presume from כְּלִי-תְמוּנָה in section one that “any form” would preclude the making of thin metal sheets; though, the midrash does not state this specifically.

⁹⁴² The first appearance of the line seems to have no obvious referent. It may serve as an introduction to this artistically-constructed section. The refrain before and after the quotation of Deut 4:16 uses the phrase כל סמל (any figure), which creates an anadiplosis-like effect. There is some resonance of this effect throughout the entire section.

(3.1-3.4) draw on Deut 4:15-19 for their scriptural prohibitions:

¹⁵Since you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, ¹⁶so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. ¹⁹And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven.

Moses here recalls the revelation at Horeb (Sinai in Exodus), when God makes the covenant with Israel and gives it the Torah amidst a mighty storm. When the people stood before God at Horeb, they did not see God. Moses states that this might become a source of temptation in the future; the people may want to create something tangible to help orient their worship, i.e., an idol—presumably of God—modeled after what they can see: humans (v. 16), any animal on earth or bird in the air (v. 17), any thing that creeps on the ground, or fish in the water (v. 18). Moreover, Moses states that the people should be wary of what is in the sky—the sun, moon, stars, and host of heaven. They should not presume these are God or gods and worship them (v. 19).

The first topic in section three is סמל (figure). The midrash states, “But perhaps he may make an image of any figure?” The midrash rejects this possibility with Deut 4:16, “so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure.” The סמל (figure) the midrash has in mind could be taken as “any figure in general”: no image/resemblances can be made of any figure of any kind. However, it is often the case in midrashic collections that only part of a scriptural passage is cited, even

though the surrounding text is intended.⁹⁴³ The full text that 3.1 has in view is “so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female.”⁹⁴⁴ The underlined phrase is left out of 3.1’s quotation. If the underlined part is taken into account, then סמל refers to “male or female” figures. In other words, images/resemblances of humans are prohibited. There is a specific rabbinic principle being employed here, known as *kelal u-ferat*. In this principle, a general statement is limited by the particular statement that immediately follows it.⁹⁴⁵ The general statement in Deut 4:16 is “the form of any figure.” Without a particular statement, “the form of any figure” could be applied broadly. However, this general statement is limited by “the likeness of male or female.” Thus, the general statement can only be in reference to humans.⁹⁴⁶

From here, the midrash, in 3.2, lists domesticated animals (בהמה), undomesticated animals (חיה),⁹⁴⁷ and fowl (עוף), and shows that images/resemblances of them are prohibited by Deut 4:17, “the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of

⁹⁴³ This can be due to a number of factors, such as the need for brevity in oral transmission, or the need for brevity due to the costliness of scribal transmission with expensive writing materials, or simply the presumption of deep familiarity with the text.

⁹⁴⁴ One can assume that 3.1’s scriptural quotation ends before Deut 4:17, since Deut 4:17 is taken up by the next subsection.

⁹⁴⁵ For more on *kelal u-ferat*, see Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 86-88.

⁹⁴⁶ Further evidence for reading 3.1 as referring to humans can be found in the order of section three: it appears to be moving backwards from the order of creation presented in Genesis 1—that is, moving in reverse, from the deep to cattle. If this is correct, then the last act of creation in Genesis 1 is the creation of humans, which is where, I argue, our midrash begins.

Admittedly, it seems strange that the midrash does not specifically identify humans, and simply uses the phrase “in the form of any figure” to identify them. Alternatively, Deut 4:16’s “in the form of any figure” could be seen both by the biblical text and midrash as an introductory phrase. After this introductory phrase, midrash then lists what is included: cattle, fowl, fish, locusts, unclean animals, etc. However, the question then arises why humans are not included in the midrash, especially when they appear at the top of the list in Deuteronomy. That would seem to be a serious omission.

⁹⁴⁷ Lauterbach translates בהמה as “cattle” and does not translate חיה. The listing of both in the midrash marks a distinction between domesticated and undomesticated animals.

any winged bird that flies in the air.”⁹⁴⁸ It then turns to fish (דג), locust (חגב), unclean animals (שקץ), and reptiles (רומש) in 3.3, and states that Deut 4:18 prohibits images of these: “the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.”⁹⁴⁹ After this, in 3.4, the midrash turns to the sun (חמה), moon (לבנה), stars (כוכבים), and planets (מזלות). Images of these are prohibited by Deut 4:19.⁹⁵⁰

At this point, the midrash leaves Deut 4:15-19, and moves back to Exod 20:4 and its list of prohibitions. In 3.5, the midrash acknowledges the possibility that images/resemblances of angels (מלאכים), cherubs (כרובים), and the *Ophannim* (אופנים, a type of angel) might be acceptable. However, images of any of these heavenly creatures are ruled out by Exod 20:4, “of anything that is in heaven above.”⁹⁵¹ After this, in 3.6, the

⁹⁴⁸ The midrash takes כָּל־בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ (all animals that are on the land) to mean both domesticated and undomesticated animals; it takes כָּל־צִפּוֹר כָּנָף to mean fowl.

⁹⁴⁹ The midrash reads כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ בָּאֲדָמָה as encompassing reptiles, locust, and unclean animals, and כָּל־דָּגָה אֲשֶׁר־בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ as fish.

The “unclean animals” and “reptiles” in 3.3 are distinct from those in 3.2, which are clean. In Lev 11:2-47 and Deut 14:3-20, one is given listings of clean and unclean animals. According to these lists, certain kinds of birds, fish, and locusts are also clean.

⁹⁵⁰ The midrash reads הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ as the sun, הַיָּרֵחַ as the moon, הַכּוֹכָבִים as the stars, and צִבְּצֵב הַשָּׁמַיִם as the planets. The context of Deut 4:19, as mentioned above, is Moses’ warning to Israel to not worship the sun, moon, or planets when they look up and see them. Our midrash understands this prohibition to include making images/resemblances of the sun, moon, and stars.

⁹⁵¹ In the מִמַּעַל section of Exod 20:4, the midrash is focused on the word מִמַּעַל (from above). Within the context of Exod 20:4, מִמַּעַל might seem emphatic or stylistic. The midrash, however, understands the word to be modifying שָׁמַיִם (heaven/sky). As Schäfer notes, presumed in this midrash is a belief that there are seven heavens (or at least more than one). The midrash admits that while שָׁמַיִם alone can be understood as the first heaven, where the sun, moon, stars, and planets are, מִמַּעַל indicates this is the שָׁמַיִם that is “above,” i.e., the fifth and seventh heavens, where the angels, cherubs, and *Ophannim* reside. See Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 190. Thus, while Deut 4:19 rules out the stars, moon, and planets, Exod 20:4 rules out the heavenly hosts.

The most curious of the list of angels is the אופנים (*Ophannim*). Following Jastrow, Lauterbach believes the אופנים should be understood as a type of angel, like the cherub. The word אופן appears in Ezek 1:15 for the four wheels of the four creatures, which can move in any direction. See Lauterbach, 322, n. 3. The *Ophannim* appear once more in the *Mekhilta* in *Bahodesh*10. In a similar way, R. Ishmael says, “Ye shall not make a likeness of My servants who serve before Me in heaven, not the likeness of angels, not the likeness of the cherubim, and not the likeness of the *Ophannim*.” In b. Rosh Hashanah 24b, b. Hagigah 12b, b. Hulin 92a, b. Avodah Zarah 43b the אופנים are listed as among the heavenly hosts, along with the Seraphim, holy Hayyoth, and ministering angels. No other description, however, is given. The rest of their appearances (twenty more) are in later midrashic compilations. The term also appears in the Jewish

deep (תהום) and darkness (חשך) are considered, but are ruled out by the latter half of Exod 20:4, “or that is in the water under the earth.”⁹⁵² Finally, in 3.7, R. Aqiva adds that the prohibition encompasses בוֹבֵיא (a reflected image in a mirror), while others say it encompasses שְׁבִירֵי (Shabriri, possibly a term that means “dazzling light”).⁹⁵³ He

liturgical description of the angels who recite Ezek 3:12b.

Peter Schäfer believes the rabbis ruled out images of angels, because they observed Romans venerating their own images of angels and feared Jews would be tempted to do the same. Schäfer also argues that some late antique Jews likely worshiped angels. He bases this on the available sources: Paul, who bans “festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths,” because they are “under the authority of angels” (Gal 4:8-10; Col 2:16-20); the Kerygma Petrou (a text from the second century CE), which states that Jews worship angels; and Origen, who rejects Celsus’ claim that Jews worship angels (*Contra Celsum* 5:6). Schäfer argues that the rejection of an alleged Jewish practice of worshiping angels does not rule it out completely. See Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus*, 191-196. One can rightly ask why the rabbis would bother ruling out a practice if it were not happening. It is important to note that worship of *images* of angels is what is at issue here. Worship according to the angelic model in the qedushah/Trisagion/sanctus is widespread and likely early.

Worth noting also is the appearance of יָכֹל, where the midrash states, “one might think it refers only to sun, moon, stars, and planets?” See footnote 918 and 937 on this topic.

⁹⁵² The midrash reads וְאֶשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ to refer to the deep and darkness. This prohibition is necessary, because Deut 4:18 only rules out fish “in the water under the earth.” Thus, while Deut 4:18 prohibits fish, Exod 20:4 prohibits the deep and darkness in the water.

⁹⁵³ The שְׁבִירֵי and בוֹבֵיא are almost equally obscure. According to Jastrow, בוֹבֵיא is a mirror, composed of any substance, such as water or metal. See Jastrow, 136. See also y. Nedarim 1:5 [51a]. Lauterbach states that ancient people believed that a reflected image was a “counterpart of the real” and possessed “separate and independent existence.” See Lauterbach, 322, n. 5. R. Aqiva may have in mind a reflection of an idol.

As for שְׁבִירֵי, Jastrow understands it as “being dazzled,” “blinking,” “temporary blindness,” or “loss of direction.” The word appears in b. *Gittin* 69a, and is understood in this context as blindness. In Maurice Simon’s notes to his translation of *Gittin*, Simon believes שְׁבִירֵי is a Shafel of בָּרַר, and can be understood as a “euphemism for blindness.” This type of blindness is brought on by demons, who can cause a daytime blindness (שְׁבִירֵי דִּמְמָא) or a nighttime blindness (שְׁבִירֵי דִּלְיָא). Simon believes that today we would understand the daytime שְׁבִירֵי as hemeralopia (a blindness caused by bright or daytime lights), and nighttime שְׁבִירֵי as nyctalopia (a difficulty or inability to see at night). See Maurice Simon, trans., *Gittin, Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylon Talmud* (London: Soncino Press, 1963), 69a, no. 1. The word also appears in b. *Avodah Zarah* 12b and b. *Pesahim* 112a. In their notes to their translation of *Avodah Zarah*, Joshua Schreier, et. al follow Rashi’s understanding of the term, which is an evil spirit that has dominion over water. See Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., *Koren Talmud Bavli: Avodah Zarah, Horayot*, vol. 32, ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2017), 65. Meanwhile, in Arnold Mishcon’s notes to his translation of *Avodah Zarah*, Mishcon believes שְׁבִירֵי is a contraction of שׁוֹבֵר רְאִיָּה (“breaker of the eyesight”). See Arnold Mishcon, trans., *Avodah Zarah* (London: Soncino Press, 1988), 12b, n. 5. In their translation of *Pesahim*, Joshua Schreier, et. al understand the term as “a demon of blindness.” See Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., *Koren Talmud Bavli: Pesahim*, vol. 7., ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2013), 255. Finally, the word appears once more in b. *Yoma* 28b. Here, שְׁבִירֵי is understood as “dazzling” light from the sun. Joshua Schreier, et. al in their translation of *Yoma*, believe that the sunlight that is referred to is the kind that penetrates the clouds and has a greater intensity than direct sunlight. See Joshua Schreier, et. al, trans., *Koren Talmud Bavli: Yoma*, vol. 9, ed. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2013), 140. It is difficult to say what the *Mekhilta* means by שְׁבִירֵי, since the word only occurs once, and contains no explanation. Since the prohibition is of images, then perhaps what the rabbis have in mind is the prohibition of depicting a brilliant, dazzling light. However, given the

provides no supporting evidence from Scripture.

One is tempted to discern a pattern or logic behind the construction of section 3. There is certainly a homiletical rhythm. As noted above, section 3.1 begins with the line “He shall not make for himself any of these images,” and this line becomes a refrain, appearing after every subsection (save for 3.7). The first four subsections are supported by Deut 4:16-19, while 3.5 and 3.6 are supported by Exod 20:4. In examining the objects that are prohibited, they begin with humans, and then move in an order of nearness to humans, starting with domesticated animals and ending with the higher heavens and the depths of the earth. The midrash also seeks to be comprehensive in its prohibitions, employing both Exod 20:4 and Deut 4:16-19. The effort to be comprehensive may be the result of the midrash reading Exod 20:4 as a merism: the extremities that the verse names—heaven and the deep—includes everything in between, which the midrash understands Deut 4:16-19 to be delineating. The only subsection that really appears out of place is 3.7. It has no supporting biblical text, and it is attributed to tradents. Despite these ruptures in the pattern, the purpose of 3.7 clearly is to contribute to the comprehensive scope of the midrash.

One might ask the purpose of the long list of prohibitions in our midrash, and why especially graven images, engravings, paintings, trees, and images of objects in the heavens, earth, and underworld are prohibited, even if they are not made or treated as idols.⁹⁵⁴ The conclusion in section four seeks to provide an answer: to remove any

variants to the *Mekhilta*’s text (see footnote 926), it is possible that this is a correction according to the Babylonian Talmud’s word.

⁹⁵⁴ See Fine, 119. Commenting on our present midrash, Fine states, “The *Mekhilta* here is a polemic against potentially idolatrous images—not against ‘art’ as a general category.” Art, to a late antique Jew, meant the “work” of a “craftsman” (Fine, 97). Fine argues earlier that there were all sorts of (non-idolatrous) artwork that the rabbis permitted. See also Gerald J. Blidstein, “The Tannaim and Plastic Arts: Problems and Perspectives,” in *Perspectives in Jewish Learning*, vol. 5, ed. B. L. Sherwin (Chicago:

possibility for the evil inclination to lead one to idolatry. While these modes, material, and images may not be created for the purpose of idolatry, one's evil inclination can influence one to treat them like idols. Thus, all of them are ruled out. Such a strict stance could be seen as an attempt to create strong protections against violating one of the most significant commandments in rabbinic understanding. It could also be based on the rabbis' experience with the Jewish and Roman world around them, that images, while benign at first, eventually lead to idolatry.⁹⁵⁵

This brings us to the question of what exactly יצר הרע (the evil inclination) is, or more precisely, what the *Mekhilta* means by the evil inclination. Ishay Rosen-Zvi, in his diachronic study of the evil inclination⁹⁵⁶ argues that the R. Ishmael corpus believes there is one inclination.⁹⁵⁷ *God* made it—and it is the vilest thing that God has created.⁹⁵⁸

Calling the inclination “evil” is unique to the R. Ishmael midrashim in the tannaitic

The College of Jewish Studies Press, 1973), 19-20. Blidstein argues that the conclusion of the midrash—the discussion on the evil inclination and its attempt to lead one to idolatry—indicates that the rabbis are only banning “images drawn from the cultic world and adopted for decorative function,” not all images. This would align with one potential reading of Deut 4:16-19. In this interpretation, Moses warns the people to not make idols modeled after humans, animals, birds, etc. One could argue that the midrash adopts this interpretation and only prohibits images that are used for the purpose of idolatry. However, it seems to me that the refrain “He will not make an image of any of these” means that our midrash is banning all images, regardless of purpose, precisely because any one of them, through the persuasion of the evil inclination, can be turned into an idol. The rabbis refuse to take any chances.

⁹⁵⁵ See the excursus at the end of the commentary on B.5.

⁹⁵⁶ Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Demonic Desires: Yetzer Hara and the Problem of Evil in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2011), 14-35.

⁹⁵⁷ This contrasts, as Rosen-Zvi states, with traditional views of rabbinic anthropology, which hold that the rabbis believed there were two *yetzers*, one that was an inclination toward evil and one toward good (יצר הטוב). A person is born with an evil inclination. This inclination grows in strength over time. The impulse to evil is not necessarily evil as one might think. Rather, one could think of it as that drive within a person that gets a person to protect him/herself, find connection with others, have children, build a career—in short, those things that propel a person to thrive. The problem is that left to its own devices, the evil inclination will lead to destruction—hurting others, harming oneself, acting unethically. What one needs is another inclination to help control the evil inclination. This is where the inclination to good comes in. One gains this inclination later in life. It is the controlling force in one's life, the drive or voice that informs one of how to steer the evil inclination toward good ends. Its instrument is Torah itself. Torah, and the study of it, give one the knowledge and power to control the evil inclination. See b. Berakhot 61a, b. Sukkah 52b, b. Nedarim 32b, and *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 4.

⁹⁵⁸ *Sifre Devarim* 45.

rabbinic corpus. This evil inclination is an “antinomian entity residing within humans that incites them against the Torah.”⁹⁵⁹ The evil inclination is not itself *part* of a human, but a separate entity, dwelling within. Nor is the evil inclination the drive to do *any* act of evil; its focus is specific: to get a person to abandon the Torah. It is fitting, then, that the R. Ishmael midrashim argue that one of the greatest weapons one has against the evil inclination is Torah study.⁹⁶⁰ Rosen-Zvi is careful to underscore that actual observance of the Torah is not the weapon itself, but the *study* of Torah. The evil inclination is relentless, constantly attempting to lead humans to abandon Torah. Thus, one must war with it without end—which means, one must constantly study Torah. But one must be wary on two counts. First, one will be tempted to stop studying Torah; when this happens, that is the evil inclination at work, employing one of its tactics.⁹⁶¹ Second, the evil inclination is an expert in Torah, able to twist the commandments in Torah in such a way that one would be led astray.⁹⁶² One of its tactics is to find loopholes in a commandment that will eventually lead one to violate the commandment. Thus, one’s study of Torah must include exploration of every possible meaning and application, in order to outmaneuver the evil inclination and bar any loophole. The end goal of the evil inclination is to get a person to commit idolatry, and its first move is to convince one to stop studying Torah.⁹⁶³

Taking Rosen-Zvi’s analysis into account, we can understand our present midrash as both prescriptive and pedagogical. Through its concluding words, and implicitly

⁹⁵⁹ Rosen-Zvi, 18.

⁹⁶⁰ *Sifre Devarim* 45; b. *Qiddushin* 30b, and b. *Sukkah* 52b.

⁹⁶¹ *Mekhilta Amaleq* 2 and *Sifre Bamidbar* 119.

⁹⁶² *Sifre Bamidbar* 88.

⁹⁶³ *Sifre Devarim* 43.

throughout the whole, it argues that every single crack through which idolatry could seep in can and must be sealed, lest the evil inclination find a way to lead one to idolatry. Therefore, it makes sense that graven images, engravings, paintings, trees, and images of the heavens, earth, and underworld are all prohibited. By making these extensive prohibitions, the midrash is able to seal every crack, and it is able to do this not simply by stating that all potential exceptions are denied, but also by performing the task itself: through its prescriptive statements, it exemplifies Torah study, teaching one not only what Torah says, but also how to study it—all this, while simultaneously fortifying a person against idolatry.

5.4.1 Excursus: The Rabbis and the Late Antique Synagogues

The prohibitions in our midrash are comprehensive and scrupulous, which raises the question of whether our midrash is addressing a real problem, or is dwelling in the realm of hypothetical. One way to approach this question is to examine synagogues of late antiquity. Archaeological findings have discovered that images were prevalent in synagogues during the Amoraic period in history.⁹⁶⁴ Synagogues in the Galilee and the Golan contained remains of carved stones. The shapes included plants, animals, and sometimes humans. Multiple synagogues, such as in Sardis, Sepphoris, Susiya, and Hammat Tiberias, had mosaic floors—though, the earliest evidence of these is the late third century CE. Often, these depict ritual accoutrements (e.g., the menorah or shofar)

⁹⁶⁴ There are essentially no known tannaitic synagogues; though, there are a few synagogues from the Second Temple Period that have been discovered. None of these, however, contain significant representational art, with the exception being the stone at Magdala, but there is no agreement about what it is.

and biblical stories including human figures. However, six of the synagogues (in Hammat Tiberias, Bet Aleph, Huseifa, Na'aran, Sepphoris, and Susiya) include depictions of Helios and the zodiac signs. Synagogues in Dura Europas and Byzantine Palestine had painted fresco walls. Many of them are too damaged to discern the depictions; however, the paintings in Dura Europas, when they were discovered, were significantly intact and had biblical scenes with images of humans and animals.⁹⁶⁵ Lee Levine argues that while it is ultimately impossible to know the exact reasons for these images, it seems most likely that images in synagogues—including the Helios and zodiac mosaics—were not purely for decorative purpose, but held religious significances, too.⁹⁶⁶

Our midrash obviously rules out such synagogue images, and yet they existed pervasively. How could this be? One simple explanation is that humans, in general, are wont to break rules, even when they are issued by authorities. Another explanation, which Levine in his comprehensive work on ancient synagogues defends, is that contrary to what the extensive corpus of rabbinic literature might suggest, the rabbinic movement was slow in gaining influence in the Jewish world. It was one of many movements that existed after the fall of the Second Temple. Whoever was in charge of the synagogues and attended them appears to not be, by and large, the rabbis—until at least the third and fourth centuries. It was not that rabbis were entirely absent until this point, but their involvement and influence dramatically increases then. However, their roles as religious leaders in synagogues did not come to the fore until the Middle Ages.⁹⁶⁷

⁹⁶⁵ See Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 360-364.

⁹⁶⁶ See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 593-612

⁹⁶⁷ See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 466-468, and Lee Levine, *Visual Judaism in Late Antiquity: Historical Contexts of Jewish Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 403-405, 410-419, 428-434. See especially the footnotes in both sources for citations of the more traditional view, which holds that the rabbis dominated the Jewish world throughout late antiquity.

As Levine points out, on the whole, the rabbis did not discuss images extensively, but when they did, they most often prohibited their creation and any benefit from them; in addition, they permitted being in idols' presence only if certain conditions were met (e.g., the image was not venerated or misconstrued as being venerated in any way).⁹⁶⁸

The extent to which the editors/authors of the *Mekhilta* knew of synagogue images, and the extent to which images were present in synagogues during the composition of our midrash or the editing of the *Mekhilta* is an open question. One might speculate that our present midrash was composed for internal use—meant only for rabbis to help distinguish themselves, even among Jews. Perhaps while other Jews created images, rabbinic Jews, while not openly objecting, chose to abstain.⁹⁶⁹ Then again, our midrash may also be a text of protest, not just of synagogue images, but of images in general (note that synagogues are not mentioned in our midrash).⁹⁷⁰ What is known,

⁹⁶⁸ See, for instance, m. Avodah Zarah 3:1-4; t. Avodah Zarah 5:1; y. Avodah Zarah 1:1 [39b], 3:1, 3 [42c-d]; y. Sheviit 8:11 [38b-c]; b. Avodah Zarah 58b-59a. See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 466-498 and Levine, *Visual Judaism*, 405-410.

⁹⁶⁹ See y. *Avodah Zarah* 3:3 [42d] and Levine, *Visual Judaism*, 427-428, 435. See also m. *Avodah Zarah* 3:4, and Catherine Hezser, "Palestinian Rabbis' Encounter with Graeco-Roman Paganism: Rabban Gamliel in the Bathhouse of Aphrodite in Acco (m. Avodah Zarah 3:4)," *Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations—Between Exclusion and Embrace: An Online Teaching Resource*, <https://jnir.div.ed.ac.uk/primary-sources/rabbinic/palestinian-rabbis-encounter-with-graeco-roman-paganism-rabban-gamliel-in-the-bathhouse-of-aphrodite-in-acco-m-a-z-34/> (accessed March 23, 2019). Hezser offers a helpful analysis of the Mishnah text. In the text, Proklos ben Philosphos asks Rabban Gamliel how it is possible for the latter to use a bathhouse that contains a statue of Aphrodite, when it is clear that Deut 13:18 clearly prohibits Jews from being in proximity to anything idolatrous. Rabban Gamliel's response, Hezser points out, is that Jews are permitted to be in proximity to idols, so long as those idols are not worshiped. Such a rule has broad application, allowing Jews to enter into a number of pagan spaces without fear of violating Torah.

⁹⁷⁰ Seth Schwartz observes that from the second to third centuries in Sepphoris, Tiberius, Lydda, and various small towns in the Galilee—all of which were dominated by a Jewish population—archaeological evidence indicates that there was not only Jewish artwork, but high volumes of Greco-Roman artwork, as well, including images of Greek gods. For Schwartz, this indicates that there was Jewish participation in the broader Greco-Roman pagan culture and religion. Schwartz argues that this was not the result of compulsion, but was a response to the collapse of crucial Jewish institutions (viz. the Temple, the Torah, and their representatives) in the wake of the failed Jewish War and Bar Kokhbah revolt, the rise of direct Roman rule in the aftermath of the revolts, and the lack of any dominant, broadly influential Jewish group to respond. The rabbis *were* a voice, but a minority one at that. Schwartz speculates that many of these Jews seem to have compartmentalized their Judaism. Some became fully paganized, while others held some Jewish markers, but participated in the broader Greco-Roman culture and religion. This is not to say these Jews by-and-large worshiped Greek gods, but for many of them, the

Levine points out, is that many of the late antique synagogues, particularly those in remote, rural places of the Galilee, the Golan, and Judea, faced iconoclasm at some point. The evidence seems to indicate it was mostly done by Jews, perhaps for religious reasons or in the face of Christian or Muslim pressures. In addition, beginning in the seventh century CE, images of humans, animals, etc. ceased to exist in newly built or remodeled Palestinian synagogues (e.g., in Ein Gedi, Jericho, and Tiberias).⁹⁷¹

5.4.2 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

This midrash raises two critical comparative issues. The first is on the topic of idols and artwork, and the second is on the topic of theological anthropology. I will address the first issue here and return to the second in B.10. W. Janzen helpfully lays out the range of views among Christian denominations today regarding idols and artwork. While the former are prohibited across all denominations, the latter is broken down by denomination. Roughly speaking, Catholics, Orthodox, and inheritors of Catholic theology (via Lutherans) accept artwork in churches and veneration of images. Meanwhile, those who are influenced by Zwingli, Calvin, the Puritans, Anabaptists, and Mennonites reject artwork in churches or for purposes of veneration either completely or with strict caveats.⁹⁷² While many (especially Catholics, Orthodox, and Lutherans) would

Greco-Roman religious artwork was not simply decorative. At the very least, it held some sort of pagan religious significance. See Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103-104, 129-161, 175-176.

⁹⁷¹ See Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 364-368. See also Fine, 121-123. Whether or not our midrash was influential in this trend, the view it represents seems to have won out.

It is worth noting that animals and scenery appear in synagogue art in other regions and time periods, most notably early modern eastern Europe.

⁹⁷² W. Janzen, 255-257, 281-282.

accept images of Christ, others are more cautious. Pokrifka, for example, argues that because of the incarnation, images of Christ can be made, but these images can only be used for pedagogical purposes.⁹⁷³ Some are more extreme. For example, Garrett argues that any image of Christ is prohibited, since no New Testament text supports it.⁹⁷⁴

Those who have been directly or indirectly influenced by Calvin's stance on the issue—that veneration of images and the appearance of images in churches are both prohibited—may believe or assume Augustine held a similar position. Calvin himself, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.XI, cites Augustine as among those church fathers who support his view. In section 6, Calvin states that Augustine is against both the worship of images and the placement of images in churches. Calvin does not quote Augustine directly, but appears to be alluding to *f. et symb.* 7.14.⁹⁷⁵ When one examines *f. et symb.* 7.14 closely, however, it is clear that Augustine is referring specifically to images of the Father. When the Creed says that the Son sits at the right hand of the Father, Augustine warns that this does not mean the Father has a human form. To think this or to create images of a sitting Father are both prohibited.⁹⁷⁶ This is consistent with Augustine's exegesis of the first commandment where he argues that this prohibits any images of the Father.⁹⁷⁷ The commandment says nothing about images of the Son. In section 10, Calvin states that according to Augustine in *en. Ps.* 113.2.4-6, veneration of

⁹⁷³ Pokrifka, 218-219, 221.

⁹⁷⁴ Garrett, 475-476.

⁹⁷⁵ I am indebted to Past Masters for identifying references for Augustine's works in Calvin's *Institutes*. See Past Masters, "John Calvin: Works and Correspondence. Electronic Edition. *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Book I.I to III.XIX: Chapter XI: It is Unlawful to Attribute a Visible Form to God, and Generally Whoever Sets Up Idols Revolts Against the True God*," IntelLex, <http://library.nlx.com.proxy.bc.edu/xtf/view?docId=calvin/calvin.01.xml;chunk.id=div.calvin.institutes.1.11;toc.depth=1;toc.id=div.calvin.institutes.1.111;brand=default> (accessed April 2, 2019).

⁹⁷⁶ Augustine states that one should understand the "image" of the sitting Father in a spiritual sense: the concept of the Father sitting means that the Father is a judge.

⁹⁷⁷ See *ep.* 55.20; *s.* 8.4, 18; and *en. Ps.* 74.11.

images of God or worshiping in the presence of images are both prohibited, because one will eventually mistake these images for God. In section 13, Calvin states that Augustine makes the same point again in *ep.* 102.3. However, in examining Augustine's comments in their context, it is clear that in both instances, Augustine is speaking specifically about the allure and danger of idols—and even more specifically, *pagan* idols, something that was still very much present in his world. Calvin has clearly repurposed Augustine's texts for his own arguments in his own context; his reformation-era argument, however, does not depend on Augustine's original intent and stands in any case.⁹⁷⁸

One could gather from *en. Ps.* 113.2.6 that while Augustine found images of Christ acceptable, he did not venerate such images. In *en. Ps.* 113.2.6, Augustine notes that pagans might critique Christians in the same way that he critiques them about their idolatry: “we ourselves have many vessels and other accessories made of similar metals, which we use in the celebration of the sacraments. They are consecrated to divine service and are called holy in honor of him who is worshiped through their use for our salvation.”⁹⁷⁹ Augustine argues the difference is that these vessels and accessories are not anthropomorphic, nor do Christians pray to them. From this, one can extrapolate that Augustine did not venerate images of Christ.

Whether or not a Christian believes images of Christ or artwork in general are permitted in worship or churches, the *Mekhilta*'s ban on all artwork, regardless of the artwork's purpose or location, takes the matter to another extreme. The vast majority of

⁹⁷⁸ For more on the topic of iconography and iconoclasm, see Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Ambrosios Giakalis, *Images of the Divine: The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council*, rev. ed. (Boston: Brill, 2005).

⁹⁷⁹ Translation from St. Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 99-120*, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. III/19 of *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2003).

evangelicals today would have no issue with artwork in non-worship contexts, provided such artwork does not encourage immoral thoughts or behavior. Even Augustine found artwork acceptable, arguing that the artist's inspiration derived from Wisdom (i.e., Christ).⁹⁸⁰ Augustine does, however, warn that the level of one's attachment to artwork adversely affects the level of one's devotion to Christ. W. Janzen makes a similar point, when he argues that artwork should be used and enjoyed, but that one should be careful, since art can easily become an idol. This is precisely the issue that the *Mekhilta* raises: the danger of the *possibility*. One might dismiss the *Mekhilta*'s position as too extreme. Nevertheless, the *Mekhilta*'s position sparks two questions that are worth considering. First, what counts as idolatry? And second, how egregious is idolatry? The ways and extent to which one seeks to protect oneself from it indicates the degree to which one is aware of its manifestations and is serious about its elimination in one's life.

5.5 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* B.9

Another Interpretation⁹⁸¹: *For I the Lord Thy God Am a Jealous God.*

Zealously do I exact punishment⁹⁸² for idolatry, but in other matters I am merciful and gracious.

A certain philosopher asked R. Gamaliel: It is written in your Torah: "For I⁹⁸³ the Lord thy God am a jealous God." But is there any power in the idol that it should arouse jealousy? A hero is jealous of

⁹⁸⁰ *Div. qu.* 78.

⁹⁸¹ This is the second of two interpretations on the line "For I the Lord Thy God Am a Jealous God" in the *Mekhilta*. The first interpretation argues the God rules over jealousy, and that jealousy has no power over God.

⁹⁸² After נִפְרַע (exact punishment), *Yalqut Shimoni*, *Midrash Hakhamim*, corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg's possession, and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have מֵהֶם (from them), which smooths out the text more. This does not appear in the Oxford manuscript or the printed editions.

⁹⁸³ The Munich manuscript and the printed editions lack אֲנִי (I). The MT has אֲנִי.

another hero, a wise man is jealous of another wise man, a rich man is jealous of another rich man, but has the idol⁹⁸⁴ any power that one⁹⁸⁵ should be jealous of it?⁹⁸⁶

R. Gamaliel said to him: Suppose a man would call his dog by the name of his father, so that when taking a vow he would vow: “By the life of this dog.” Against whom would the father be incensed? Against the son or the dog?

Said the philosopher to him: Some idols are worth while.⁹⁸⁷

“What makes you think so?” asked R. Gamaliel.

Said the philosopher: There raged a fire in a certain province but the temple of the idol in it was saved.⁹⁸⁸ Was it not because the idol could take care of itself?

Said R. Gamaliel to him: I will give you a parable: To what is this comparable? To the conduct of a king of flesh and blood when he goes out to war. Against whom does he wage war, against the living or against the dead?

The philosopher then said: “Indeed, only against the living.” Then he said again: But if there is no usefulness in any of them,⁹⁸⁹ why does He not annihilate them?

Said R. Gamaliel to him: But is it only one object that you worship? Behold, you worship the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets, the mountains and the hills, the springs and the glens, and even human beings. Shall he destroy His world because of fools? “Shall I utterly consume all things from off the face of the earth? Saith the Lord” (Zeph. 1.2).

⁹⁸⁴ The Hebrew for “idol” is עבודה זרה, which can also be translated as “idolatry.” See footnotes 987-989.

⁹⁸⁵ The term להתקנות בה (one should be jealous of it) is more literally translated “to be jealous with it.” The phrase is in reference to God. The philosopher is asking if the idol has any power that God should be jealous of it.

⁹⁸⁶ The Oxford manuscript lacks the section from גבור מתקנא בגבור (a hero is jealous of another hero) to עבודה זרה להתקנות בה (with an idol to be jealous with it?). With the section, the philosopher could be seen as initially skeptical or combative. Without the section, the philosopher could be seen as genuinely curious about the meaning of Torah. Philosophers in rabbinic literature, however, usually serve as oppositional figures. See footnote 995.

⁹⁸⁷ The Hebrew text reads יש למקצתה צורך, which Lauterbach translates as “Some idols are worth while.” A more literal translation would read, “There is need for a small amount of it” or “Isn’t there need for a small amount of it?” The “it” is in the feminine and refers to עבודה זרה (idol/idolatry), which the philosopher discusses in his analogy of the hero. See footnotes 984 and 989. The point is that the philosopher is arguing that some idols have value, even if the majority do not.

The Oxford and Munich manuscripts have וכי (is there not?) before יש (there is), rendering the sentence, “is there not some need of a bit of it [an idol]?” This makes the philosopher’s statement more forceful.

⁹⁸⁸ Instead of הוצל בית (the house/temple was saved), the printed editions have חוץ לבית (outside the temple). In other words, the fire raged, but did not come near the temple of the idol.

⁹⁸⁹ The Hebrew text reads הואיל ואין למקצתה צורך, which Lauterbach translates as “But if there is no usefulness of any of them.” A more literal translation would read, “Since there is no need for a small amount of it” or “Since there is no need for any of it.” The “it” is in the feminine and refers to עבודה זרה (idol/idolatry). See footnotes 984 and 987.

—The philosopher also said to him: Since it causes the wicked to stumble, why does God not remove it from the world?—

But R. Gamaliel continued saying: Because of fools? If so,⁹⁹⁰ then since they also worship human beings: “Shall I cut off man from off the face of the earth?” (ibid., v. 3).⁹⁹¹

I have divided this section into paragraphs to help track the flow of the conversation. The initial midrash is thematically and theologically similar to B.8. Both interpretations show a degree of discomfort with the possibility of a jealous God. In general, neither the *Mekhilta*⁹⁹² nor broader rabbinic literature are opposed to anthropomorphisms. The possibility, however, of God exhibiting jealousy seems to exceed the limit for B.8 and B.9. The term קנא can mean both “jealousy” and “zeal.” Our present midrash takes אל קנא to mean that God in Godself is not jealous; rather, the way God punishes⁹⁹³ idolaters is with zeal (i.e., high intensity). In contrast, with other sins, God responds with mercy and compassion.⁹⁹⁴ Clearly, idolatry is in its own category of seriousness—receiving no mercy or compassion. When interpreted in this way, Exod 20:5 is less a description of God’s character and more a warning to potential offenders.

The *Mekhilta* then turns to a debate between an unnamed philosopher and Rabban Gamaliel II.⁹⁹⁵ Its relation to the initial interpretation in this section will become clearer

⁹⁹⁰ Instead of אם כן (if so), the Munich manuscript, the printed editions, and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have אמר לו אם כן (he said to him, “If so”), making the text smoother.

⁹⁹¹ In other words, the philosopher had previously reasoned that the best way to rid the world of idolatry is for God to destroy every idol. R. Gamaliel shows the philosopher that if God does this, even humans would be destroyed, since humans do worship other humans. R. Gamaliel is reading the Zeph 1:3 quote as a question. Translations like the NIV and NRSV translate it in the indicative.

⁹⁹² For example, see *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 5 (A.3), in which God appears to Israel as “a mighty hero” and an “old man.”

⁹⁹³ The verb the midrash uses is a Niphal form of פָּרַע. Lauterbach translates this as “to punish,” which is a standard translation for the verb. The underlying sense of the verb is “to collect payment from.” In this way, the act of sin creates a debt that must be repaid, and when God comes to collect payment, God acts zealously with idolaters.

⁹⁹⁴ Lauterbach translates חַנּוּן as “graciousness.” The word can also be translated as “compassion.”

⁹⁹⁵ Discourses of this type raise the question of whether they actually happened—in addition to the reasons they were remembered in the ways they were. Conversations with Romans are not uncommon in rabbinic literature. E.g., see b. *Sanhedrin* 91b, in which the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius debates R.

below. The debate consists of ten exchanges, five for each side. The philosopher begins with a question, quoting Exod 20:5, “For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.”⁹⁹⁶ With this, the philosopher asks, “But is there any power in the idol that it should arouse jealousy?” The title of “philosopher” and the dialogue’s proximity to B.9’s initial midrash and B.8 might give the impression that the philosopher’s main contention with the God of Israel is that this God is emotional. Such a critique might place this philosopher in a (quasi-)Stoic tradition. According to the philosopher, heroes can be jealous of heroes, wise men can be jealous of wise men, rich men can be jealous of rich men, but how can God be jealous of idols? What the philosopher is arguing is that jealousy can only be experienced by someone who encounters another person who is equivalent or greater than him/her. If God surpasses all of creation, then how is it possible for God to be jealous of idols, which, according to the rabbis, are worthless and false? R. Gamaliel responds to the philosopher with his own analogy about a man, his dog, and his father. In this analogy, the man is a Jew, his dog is an idol, and his father is God. If a man gives his dog his father’s name and then swears by the life of that dog, the

Judah HaNasi; b. Sanhedrin 39a, in which a Caesar debates Rabban Gamaliel; and *Bereshit Rabbah* 17:7, in which a Roman noblewoman debates R. Yose. Whether a conversation occurred between an unnamed philosopher (the philosopher’s school is also unnamed) and the famous Rabban Gamaliel II (leader of the emerging rabbinic movement after the destruction of the Second Temple) cannot be ultimately determined. In regard to R. Gamaliel’s debate with Proklos ben Philosophos (or possibly Proklos the Philosopher) about the presence of an Aphrodite idol in a public bathhouse (m. *Avodah Zarah* 3:4), Hezser points out that Proklos is depicted as “generic and stereotypical.” Whether or not the debate actually happened is not the point of the story. Proklos’ appearance is in service to exploring and resolving a real issue about idols in public spaces, and whether Jews can be in proximity to those idols. A real Greek philosopher’s knowledge of Torah would have been limited or nonexistent. Proklos’ sophisticated knowledge of Torah enables R. Gamaliel to provide a sophisticated response. See Hezser, “Palestinian Rabbis.” The presence of a philosopher in our midrash appears to have a similar function. The conversation itself in our midrash also reveals some inaccuracies about Roman religion. Intentional or not, the inaccuracies give a window into rabbinic understandings of Roman religion. One particularly intriguing aspect of the debate is that even though R. Gamaliel wins in the end, the philosopher is depicted with skill and intellect.

⁹⁹⁶ The degree to which the philosopher is aware of rabbinic Judaism is an open question. See footnote 1004, in which Lauterbach proposes that the philosopher is aware of Zephaniah.

father will be zealous toward his son, not the dog. Similarly, if a man calls an idol by God's name and swears by the idol, God will be zealous toward the man, not the idol. What makes the man's error particularly egregious in this analogy is that oaths were considered real invocations of power to be avoided if at all possible.⁹⁹⁷ In addition, dogs were viewed as lowly creatures in Tannaitic literature.⁹⁹⁸ In light of this, the man is not only making use of a powerful institution, but is equating God with an utterly debased object in the process. So, the philosopher has it wrong. God is not jealous of the idol, but is rightly zealous toward the man who errs in associating God's name with the idol, thereby denigrating God in the context of an institution with grave importance.

R. Gamaliel's response aligns with the initial midrash in B.9. In both interpretations, God's nature does not possess jealousy. Rather, God *acts* with קנא (zeal) toward an idolater, swiftly and effectively correcting a misidentification between God's name and an object. The debate extends its answer further than the initial midrash, however, by highlighting the fact that jealousy necessitates that one be on par with the person whom one is jealous. Just as the father in the analogy is not on par with the son, God, in an infinitely grander way, is on par with no one, and therefore cannot experience jealousy. One might discern in God's zeal, then, the kind of zeal a father would have toward a child whom the father desires to develop successfully.

Rather than responding to R. Gamaliel's question, the philosopher states plainly,

⁹⁹⁷ See chapter 6 on how this plays out in a rabbinic context.

⁹⁹⁸ For example, in *Sifre Devarim* 130, the Egyptians who had enslaved Israel for many years are compared to ravenous dogs. In *Mekhila Kaspā* 11, dogs are seen as less valuable than foreigners. In *Sifre Devarim* 343, the nations of the world are compared to a dog: as a dog is unable to carry a light load, so too the nations of the world cannot uphold the Seven Noahide Laws (on the Seven Noahide Laws, see footnote 818). Meanwhile, Israel is compared to an ass, which can carry not only the dog's load, but also a much heavier load (i.e., the Seven Noahide Laws, in addition to the written and oral Torah).

“There is need for a small amount of it [idol/idolatry].”⁹⁹⁹ R. Gamaliel asks for the philosopher’s proof. The philosopher proceeds to describe a situation in which a fire raged in a city.¹⁰⁰⁰ The temple of the idol, however, was spared. To the philosopher, this is proof that the idol is not worthless, as it clearly managed to save the temple it was in. It is at this point that the philosopher’s real concern comes to full view. The philosopher is less concerned with the nature of the God of Israel, and whether this God can logically be jealous.¹⁰⁰¹ Rather, the philosopher is far more concerned about the existence of other gods. The philosopher believes other gods do exist, and that there is real, powerful, and dynamic interaction between these gods, their idols, and humans. The hope of the philosopher, through this dialogue, is to convince R. Gamaliel of this belief, too.

Consequently, in his initial question, the philosopher is not actually targeting a possible inconsistency in the Bible’s theology (i.e., that the omnipotent God could be jealous of an idol), but he is rather trying to use Scripture to prove the existence of other gods. The philosopher is arguing that Scripture itself states that God is jealous of idols; if God can be jealous of idols, then idols are real and possess stature and powers that are on

⁹⁹⁹ The Hebrew text reads *יש למקצתה צורך*. Lauterbach translates this as “Some idols are worth while.” See footnote 987. In other words, some idols are necessary, contrary to what a rabbi (e.g., the fourth response in B.3) might argue. Interestingly, the argument that the philosopher proceeds to give does not revolve around the idol aiding humans, as one might expect, but around the idol aiding itself. However, one might suppose the fire was intended as punishment for the people, or the temple was sought as refuge, thus sparing those who entered it.

¹⁰⁰⁰ The Hebrew is *מדינה* (an unidentified city or country). On two separate occasions (between the third and first century BCE) the Temple of Vesta in Rome survived fires. However, it was often the case that temples burned to the ground or were badly damaged when fires encroached upon them. See H. V. Canter, “Conflagrations in Ancient Rome,” *The Classical Journal* 27:4 (January 1932), 270-280. Whether the philosopher’s story ever took place is not clear, as the philosopher does not indicate where it happened. The point, however, is not which temple in particular the philosopher has in mind, but the fact that a temple’s destruction by fire or survival are both possible.

¹⁰⁰¹ The philosopher may well be portrayed as following Neoplatonism, which would rise in the third century, the time of the redaction of the *Mekhilta*. What seems most likely, however, is that the *Mekhilta* is not entirely concerned with accuracy. The philosopher need only hold basic traits of a Roman philosopher for the purposes of the debate—namely, a polytheistic belief and a logical form of argumentation.

par with God. As stated before, R. Gamaliel rejects this notion by claiming that God is not jealous of the idols, but acts זקן (zealously) toward idolaters. After failing to use Scripture to his advantage effectively, the philosopher now appeals to history and logical deduction. R. Gamaliel responds to the philosopher's second attempt with a parable of a human king. R. Gamaliel asks if this king fights against the living or the dead. Before he turns to the *nimshal*, the philosopher knows immediately what R. Gamaliel is getting at: like the human king, God fights the living (i.e., people), not the dead (i.e., idols).

The implication of R. Gamaliel's response seems to be that if a fire were to ravage a city, it is God who sent the fire. Since God's concern is with the people, the temple where the idol lies is of no concern to God, and so it does not really matter whether the temple survives. R. Gamaliel's response, however, opens up two opportunities for the philosopher. In the first, R. Gamaliel's view of God seems to indicate that God removes what is of no use to God (i.e., idolatrous people). The philosopher reasons from this that if this is how God operates, then God should also remove idols, which are of no use to God. Underlying this proposition is an argument that perhaps God actually cannot do this, because idols have power. R. Gamaliel responds that destroying idols would be an absurd act, because the philosopher's people worship far more than one object; in fact, they worship many objects of creation, even humans.¹⁰⁰² R. Gamaliel states, "Shall he destroy His world because of fools?" He then supports his argument by citing Zeph 1:2,

¹⁰⁰² R. Gamaliel's statement is not entirely accurate. The objects of Roman worship were not the sun, moon, stars, etc. themselves, but the gods of those objects: e.g., Sol Invictus (sun god), Diana (moon goddess), and Lucifer (morning star god). Interestingly, the philosopher does not correct R. Gamaliel—perhaps an indication of the *Mekhila*'s rabbinic perception or bias. However, it seems inevitable that some Romans would mistake the objects for the gods themselves, and perhaps this is what R. Gamaliel has in mind. What R. Gamaliel is absolutely correct about, however, is the imperial cult, in which the emperor himself was often understood as a god (typically, the apotheosis occurred after his death, though, with two exceptions, Nero and Caligula).

in which God asks rhetorically if God should destroy the world.¹⁰⁰³ R. Gamaliel's argument is that it is not that the idols have power; rather, it is because God does not want to destroy the world that God does not annihilate idols.

The philosopher now moves to the second opportunity.¹⁰⁰⁴ R. Gamaliel's parable indicates that God will wage war with the living—the idolaters—and so if a fire comes to consume a city, it is aimed at *them*, the idolaters. The philosopher responds to this by saying that the better act would be for God to remove the idols from the world. The philosopher's reasoning is not made explicit; on the one hand, such a divine act would be more efficient, and, on the other hand, it would spare countless people from committing idolatry, and ultimately facing God's punishment. R. Gamaliel finds his previous answer still useful. Since humans are worshiped as gods, by the philosopher's own logic, humans would also have to be destroyed. To that horrendous possibility, God rightly responds, "Shall I cut off man from off the face of the earth?" (Zeph 1:3). According to R. Gamaliel, creation itself holds the potential for goodness and sin. For creation to exist, one cannot be had without the other. Though the sun, moon, and rivers may lead to idolatry, they are also what give the world life. And though many may succumb to

¹⁰⁰³ Lauterbach correctly translates R. Gamaliel's quotation of Zeph 1:2 as a rhetorical question. God would not actually destroy the world. However, a plain sense reading of Zephaniah would suggest that God is not posing a rhetorical question, but is making indicative statements. On the day of the Lord (Zeph 1:7), God will destroy the world. Only the "shameless nation" will survive, if it gathers together in time (2:1-2)—likely a reference to Israel and the ingathering of exiles. The indicative nature of Zephaniah was likely not lost on R. Gamaliel. However, his reading is possible. By framing the text in this way, R. Gamaliel offers a new interpretation of Zephaniah.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Lauterbach supposes that the philosopher interrupts R. Gamaliel's recitation of Zeph 1:2 and proposes that God destroy the idols, because they "cause the wicked to stumble." The philosopher, knowing the passage R. Gamaliel is citing, anticipates the next verse (v. 3), in which God states "I will make the wicked stumble." R. Gamaliel continues his recitation of Zephaniah, picking up right after the line that the philosopher alludes to: "Shall I cut off man from off the face of the earth?" By doing this, R. Gamaliel takes the section the philosopher had intended as a counterargument and provides the proper reading. R. Gamaliel shows that the line should actually be read rhetorically as, "will I make the wicked stumble?" This move, in effect, frees God from being accused of causing people to sin. See Lauterbach, 324, n. 6. Lauterbach's proposal is highly attractive and a possible alternative to the one I present.

idolatry, as Zephaniah itself states, that does not preclude that there will be a group that will not (see Zeph 2:1-2). Perhaps here also one cannot be had without the other.

By the end of their debate, R. Gamaliel has the upper hand, but not without some signs of weakness. Most noticeably, R. Gamaliel's parable still raises questions. What does it mean for God to wage war against the living? Does God end idolaters' lives? If so, why only some? Does this not contradict R. Gamaliel's final argument? It is left to the reader to respond.

5.5.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The *Mekhilta*'s concern about God's jealousy and the need to explain it is shared among the Christian commentators. Augustine finds jealousy completely incommensurate with God's immutable nature, and argues that God is not actually jealous. The reason why the Bible describes God as jealous, according to Augustine, is to facilitate the reader's understanding of God. Without words or descriptors like this, a human has little aid in arriving at knowledge of God. Words, though, are temporary aids. The ultimate purpose of human language is to lead one to "divine silence," an understanding of God that is beyond words. Augustine then states that what Exod 20:5 means by "jealousy" is that God is jealous in the way a husband is in guarding his wife's chastity. The extent God will go to ensure God's people remain faithful to God can be described, though imperfectly, with the word "jealous."¹⁰⁰⁵

While none of the evangelical commentators engage as deeply as Augustine in the

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Trin.* 1.2 and *c. Adim.* 7,4.

theological or philosophical aspects of the issue, some agree with Augustine that God's jealousy is a way of describing God's desire to keep Israel faithful.¹⁰⁰⁶ Others are similar to Augustine in employing a metaphor of marriage. However, rather than understanding jealousy as a strong desire to protect a relationship, jealousy is taken to mean anguish over unfaithfulness. Dozeman, for example, uses a canonical approach to arrive at the conclusion that נָאֵץ in the Hebrew Bible appears in the context of marital relations, passion, and love, and is typically the emotion one feels when one suspects one's spouse has committed adultery.¹⁰⁰⁷ This kind of jealousy is emotionally charged and can include violent behavior. For Dozeman, one can infer from this that God's jealousy is also emotionally charged and possibly violent when Israel worships other gods or makes idols.¹⁰⁰⁸ Gowan, meanwhile, goes a different direction from the marriage metaphor, preferring the metaphor of parent-child, instead. The jealousy God feels when Israel is unfaithful, he argues, is similar to the mixture of love and anger a parent feels toward a child.¹⁰⁰⁹

For our midrash, the idea of depicting God as jealous, even if that jealousy is justified, would run into difficulty. The reason is that such an emotion would signal that God is somehow threatened by an object that is supposedly supremely inferior to God. The midrash, therefore, seeks to disabuse anyone from ever thinking God could somehow be thrown into insecurity by a person or object. This is why R. Gamaliel prefers the metaphor of parent-child. With this metaphor, the emphasis is placed on protection of the relationship and correction when necessary. R. Gamaliel's understanding of jealousy,

¹⁰⁰⁶ E.g., see Enns, 415-416; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 30-32.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Dozeman points to Num 5:11-31; 25:11; Hos 2:7, 10-14; 9:15.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Dozeman, 483-485.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Gowan, 419.

then, is similar to Augustine's. However, R. Gamaliel does not go to the extent Augustine does in philosophizing about language and its limits. At no point does R. Gamaliel give the impression that he supports an apophatic theology, or that the words of Torah are somehow ultimately deficient. Quite the opposite, words remain essential for understanding God. The problem, for R. Gamaliel, is whether the interpreter understands those words correctly.

While the evangelical commentators are concentrated solely on the meaning of jealousy, the *Mekhilta* also raises an important question that arises from such an examination: why does God allow idols in the first place? In the midst of his exegesis of Exod 20:5, Augustine, who lives in a similar world to the *Mekhilta*, a world filled with polytheism, receives an analogous question from Adimantus, who argues that God is unjust in God's petty jealousy of other gods, which prevents God from allowing people to worship other gods.¹⁰¹⁰ Augustine responds that God's jealousy is what ensures the salvation of the world: by acting jealously, God spurs people toward salvation. The *Mekhilta*'s answer is quite distinct. R. Gamaliel argues that if God were to remove all idols, there would be no people, no animals, no plants, no creation. To have a world, and to have humans who dwell in it, God must allow for the reality that both will be abused. There is a symmetry in Augustine and R. Gamaliel's responses. Together, they explain why idols persist, and why God responds in the way God does.

¹⁰¹⁰ C. *Adim.* 11

5.6 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA B.10

10. *Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children.* When there is no skip, but not when there is a skip.¹⁰¹¹ How is this? The wicked son of a wicked father, who in turn also was the son of a wicked father. R. Nathan says: A destroyer the son of a destroyer, who in turn was the son of a destroyer. When Moses heard this word: “And Moses made haste,¹⁰¹² and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped” (Ex. 34.8). For he said: God forbid!¹⁰¹³ In Israel there is no case of a wicked son of a wicked father who in turn was also the son of a wicked father. One might think¹⁰¹⁴ that just as the measure of punishment¹⁰¹⁵ extends over four generations, so also the measure of rewarding the good extends only over four generations. But Scripture says: “Unto thousands.” But: “Unto thousands” I might understand to mean the minimum of “thousands,” that is, two thousand [people,] but it also says: “To a thousand generations” (Deut. 7.9)—generations unsearched and uncounted.

For this midrash, the variations in textual witnesses are serious enough that it is worth examining them closely, as each version presents a different theology. There are five versions:

1. בזמן שאינן מסורגין ולא בזמן שהן מסורגין
When they are not interrupted,¹⁰¹⁶ but not when they are interrupted.¹⁰¹⁷
2. בזמן שאינן מסורגין או בזמן שהן מסורגין

¹⁰¹¹ There are numerous textual variations for בזמן שאינן מסורגין ולא בזמן שהן מסורגין (When there is no skip, but not when there is a skip), which will be discussed below.

¹⁰¹² The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks וימהר משה (and Moses made haste). The MT has the phrase.

¹⁰¹³ Instead of אמר חס ושלום (he said, “God forbid!”), the Oxford manuscript has אמר המקום (God said), while the Munich manuscript has אמר הקב”ה ח”י (the Holy One, blessed be He, said, “God forbid”).

¹⁰¹⁴ Lauterbach prefers יכול (one might think), following corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg’s possession, *Ot Emet*, and R. Moses Frankfort’s corrections in his commentary to the *Mekilta*. This would follow a standard convention of ת”ל... יכול... (I might think... but Scripture says). On the topic of the יכול construction and its comparison to שומע אני, see footnote 918. Meanwhile, *Yalqut Shimoni*, *Efat Zedek*, the Oxford and Munich manuscripts, the printed editions, and the Horowitz-Rabin edition lack יכול.

¹⁰¹⁵ Instead of הפורעניות (the punishments), the Horowitz-Rabin edition has פורענות (punishments). The definitive article (ה) gives the impression there is a standard punishment.

¹⁰¹⁶ The word for “interruption” is a Pual participle of סרג, which can mean “skip,” as Lauterbach translates it, or “interruption.” I prefer the latter, as the word “skip” gives the impression that only the second generation is at stake. It appears to me that the issue is whether all three generations are at fault.

¹⁰¹⁷ This is Lauterbach’s preference, which follows the Munich and Oxford manuscripts in the first clause, and *Sefer Vehizhir* and Meir Friedmann’s corrections in his edition of the *Mekhilta* in the second clause.

When they are not interrupted, or [also] in the case that they are interrupted.¹⁰¹⁸

3. בזמן שהם אינן מסרגין או בזמן שהן מסורגין
In the case they do not interrupt, or [also] in the case that they are interrupted.¹⁰¹⁹
4. בזמן שהם מסרגין ולא בזמן שאינם מסרגין
In the case when they interrupt, and not in the case that they do not interrupt.¹⁰²⁰
5. בזמן שהם מסורגין
In the case when they are interrupted.¹⁰²¹

The first states that God will only enact cross-generational punishment if every generation in a row commits idolatry. The fourth and fifth versions hold the exact opposite position: God will only enact cross-generational punishment if there is a skip between any of the generations (e.g., if the first and third generations commit idolatry, but the second generation *does not*). In the second and third versions, as long as two generations in a sequence of three commit idolatry, God will enact a cross-generational punishment. All of these remain rather vague as to the actual meaning.

In what follows, my goal will not be to argue which version I believe is original; rather, I will discuss the implications of each version. All five are prompted by a possible discomfort with the theology of Exod 20:5. The text reads:

פֶּקֶד עֲוֹן אָבֹת עַל בְּנֵים עַל שְׁלִישִׁים וְעַל רְבָעִים לְשִׁנְאָי.

One could understand the text as saying that God will punish the עֲוֹן (iniquity) of a father on his descendants up to the third and fourth generation. For each version, this reading would violate a sense of justice. Behind each version is the question: is it just for the

¹⁰¹⁸ This version follows the Oxford and Munich manuscripts, and is also the version preferred by the Horowitz-Rabin edition.

¹⁰¹⁹ This version follows the printed editions.

¹⁰²⁰ This version follows R. Moses Frankfort's corrections in his commentary to the *Mekilta*.

¹⁰²¹ This version follows the *Yalqut Shimoni*, corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg's possession, and corrections in the *Shevut Yehudah* commentary of the Leghorn *Mekhila* edition in the first clause. The second clause is lacking in the *Yalqut Shimoni*, corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg's possession, David Hoffmann's edition of *Mekilta de R. Simon b. Yoḥai*, and *Efat Zedek*.

descendants of an idolatrous father to be punished, if the descendants themselves never committed idolatry? Each version answers this question in the negative, interpreting Exod 20:5 in its own way. In the first version, every generation in a row (either three or four; the midrash does not specify) must commit adultery for the punishment to be enacted. If one of them does not, then cross-generational punishment will not occur. The logic here seems to be that three/four generations of idolatry is not only egregious and deserving of cross-generational punishment, but that three/four generations of idolatry creates a trend that will not be disrupted without the intervention of cross-generational punishment. If the second generation does not commit idolatry, or if the third does not, then it is clear a trend has not been set, and intervention and special punishment are unnecessary.¹⁰²²

In the fourth and fifth versions, only an interruption would prompt cross-generational punishment. This, at first, might seem odd, especially in light of the first version's position. However, what the fourth and fifth versions seem to be arguing is that a pause and resumption of idolatry is a more problematic issue. For example, if the second generation rejects idolatry, and the third generation commits it, then it would seem all are at fault: the first and third generations for committing idolatry, and the second for its failure to properly teach the third. Idolatry could have been rooted out, but instead, the second generation allowed it to return. In contrast, generational idolatry should not receive special punishment, because it is uniquely difficult to break a trend, especially when that trend is a family tradition.

¹⁰²² For instance, perhaps a father committed idolatry, but the son did not. Then, *his* son, the grandson, commits idolatry. Clearly, the second generation is not at fault, so why should it be punished? Alternatively, perhaps a father taught a son idolatry, and the son in turn attempted to teach his son idolatry, but this son resisted. It seems in this case that the third generation should actually be rewarded, not punished.

In the second and third versions, regardless of an interruption, the punishment remains cross-generational. In this way, the seriousness of idolatry is underscored, as is the warning: *every* generation must refrain from idolatry, lest all of them be punished. The only exception is if the father alone sins. Only then will the punishment be the father's.

What all five versions do agree on is the reason for cross-generational punishment. A father's actions alone cannot cause cross-generational punishment. But if the right conditions are met, according to each version, the punishment the father receives intensifies through the generations: each generation receives its own punishment, and those of the previous generations.¹⁰²³

Next in the midrash comes an explanation of how the cross-generational counting system in Exod 20:5 works for three generations of idolaters: "The wicked son of a wicked father, who in turn also was the son of a wicked father." This is accompanied by a statement from R. Nathan: "A destroyer the son of a destroyer, who in turn was the son of a destroyer." The word for "destroyer" is קוצץ. A better translation might be "heretic" (in this case, by way of idolatry).¹⁰²⁴ In other words, R. Nathan is saying, "a heretic the son

¹⁰²³ The biblical text states פֶּקֶד עֲוֹן אָבִיתָ. Father (אב) is in the plural, which indicates that the punishment of each father's sin is placed upon the next generation. However, אבות can also mean "parents." If the midrash were to understand the word in this way, then it could be the punishment of the initial parents which is placed upon all other generations, so that one receives the punishment one deserves, along with the punishment of the initial parents.

¹⁰²⁴ See t. Hagigah 2:3; y. Hagigah 2:1 [77b]; b. Hagigah 14b-15b, and Jastrow, 899 under the entry נטיעה. The Tosefta and two Talmuds relate a famous story of four sages who entered an orchard. Ben Azzai dies, Ben Zoma goes insane, Elisha b. Abuyah קיצץ בנטיעות (literally, "mutilated the shoots"; Jastrow's translation), and R. Aqiva left in peace. The meaning of קיצץ בנטיעות in the Tosefta is not entirely clear, but receives generous attention in the Yerushalmi. Here, Elisha b. Abuyah is referred to as אחר (other), and as an אחר, he קיצץ בנטיעות (mutilated the shoots). The Yerushalmi takes this to mean that he killed apprentices and scholars/disciples of Torah (which could be understood literally or metaphorically). He also discouraged students from studying Torah, and instructed Romans on how to effectively force Jews to break the Sabbath. For our purposes, the point is that קיצץ בנטיעות is understood in the Yerushalmi as the actions of אחר, which the Yerushalmi describes as nothing less than heretical. For more on Elisha b. Abuyah, an analysis of the sources, and a critical reevaluation of his life and deeds, see Alon Goshen-

of a heretic, who in turn was the son of a heretic.”

Upon hearing the commandment’s motivation clause,¹⁰²⁵ our midrash states that Moses bows to the earth and worships God.¹⁰²⁶ Moses then says, “God forbid! In Israel there is no case of a wicked son of a wicked father who in turn was also the son of a wicked father.” If this statement were in response to the first version, Moses expresses both shock and relief. He is shocked by the intensity of the punishment or the very idea that there would be three generations of idolaters, but he is relieved, because he knows that though there will be idolaters in Israel, there will never be three consecutive generations of them. Thus, cross-generational punishment will never occur. Fittingly, Moses bows his head and worships God. If the statement were in response to the second and third versions, Moses displays both shock and relief, again. However, this time, he is shocked that cross-generational punishment is enacted regardless of whether there is a skip in the generations. But he is relieved and takes solace in the knowledge that at least

Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), especially 81-88, and also 37-80. Cf. Jastrow, 1407. According to Jastrow, as a sequence (e.g., בן קוצץ, קוצץ בן קוצץ), the term can mean “wicked by heredity.” R. Nathan’s comment, then, could be understood as saying that if idolatry exists across generations, then it is hereditary.

¹⁰²⁵ The Hebrew text states כִּי־יִשְׁמָעֵל מִשְׁמַע מֶשֶׁה אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה, which Lauterbach translates as “When Moses heard this word.” The “word” (הַדְּבָר) that Moses hears could either be the motivation clause itself or the entire Word (i.e., second commandment).

¹⁰²⁶ The *Mekhilta* quotes a verse from the story of the golden calf. After Moses smashes the first set of tablets, God commands Moses to cut two new tablets of stone, so that God can write on them what God had written on the previous tablets. Moses cuts out two tablets and meets God on the mountain. Upon Moses’ arrival, God begins a soliloquy, describing God’s own attributes. Included in this description is “by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation” (Exod 34:7). It is at this point that Moses bows and worships. The midrash appears to have turned to Exod 34:7-8, because it reinforces the cross-generational punishment set out in Exod 20:4-5 and further explains its mechanics. If the midrash has the whole golden calf story in mind, then it understands Moses to be bowing down and worshipping God after hearing the motivation clause the second time. Otherwise, it understands Exod 34:7-8 to be providing further explanation to Exod 20:4-5, and Moses to be bowing down after God speaks Exod 20:4-5.

Lauterbach speculates that Moses’ response and the Exod 34:8 quotation is originally from a midrash on Exod 34:8, and not Exod 20:5. See Lauterbach, 324, n. 7. There are no textual witnesses that would confirm this speculation, however.

there is no case of three generations of idolaters in a row.¹⁰²⁷ Finally, if the statement were in response to the fourth and fifth versions, Moses expresses only pure shock. Moses knows there is no case in which there are three generations of idolaters in a row. Thus, Israel will never be able to take advantage of the one caveat in the motivation clause—that three generations in a row will be exempt from cross-generational punishment. Admittedly, Moses’ response, along with the explanation of how the cross-generational counting system works, fits more naturally with the first version, which seems to be the reason why Lauterbach (re)constructed the first version.¹⁰²⁸

The last part of this midrash focuses on Exod 20:6:

וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׂמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי

“but showering steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

The midrash for this text moves in a crescendo of astonishment. It begins with a principle of justice: measure for measure. It would seem logical that since God’s פורענות (punishment) extends to four generations for those who commit idolatry, then God’s טוב (good/favor)¹⁰²⁹ should also extend to four generations, as well, to those who love God and keep God’s commandments. Scripture, however, does not use this principle, and states that God’s טוב extends to אלפים (thousands). The midrash then asks what the

¹⁰²⁷ See footnote 1013. In the Oxford and Munich manuscripts, it is God who says, “In Israel there is no case of a wicked son of a wicked father who in turn was also the son of a wicked father.” God effectively rules out “in the case that they do not interrupt.” That leaves “in the case they do interrupt.” That could render the midrash into a question: “In the case they do not interrupt, or in the case that they do interrupt?” God would then respond, “In Israel there is no case of a wicked son of a wicked father who in turn was also the son of a wicked father.” Thus, the correct answer would be, “in the case that they do interrupt.”

¹⁰²⁸ A variation on the first version is also found in *Pesiqta d’Rav Kahana* 25.3. Here, the midrash explains at length that cross-generational punishment will only be applied if there is no skip in the generations. Moses is elated, because he knows there is no case of this in Israel.

¹⁰²⁹ The midrash understands חֶסֶד (steadfast love) in specific terms: it means enacting good/favor.

minimum number אלפים can be. Since אלפים is plural, the minimum might be two thousand. However, a *gezerah shavah*¹⁰³⁰ with Deut 7:9¹⁰³¹ prevents this possibility.¹⁰³² The Deuteronomy text states לאלף דור (to a thousand generations). Read in light of this, Exod 20:6's אלפים can also mean a thousand generations, an extraordinarily large number of people, or in the words of the midrash, “generations unsearched and uncounded.”¹⁰³³

One final question left to the reader is the relationship between cross-generational punishment and cross-generational blessing in Exod 20:4-6. Can one receive both simultaneously? Can cross-generational punishment cancel out cross-generational blessing, and vice versa? The way in which the midrash is phrased indicates the former. After Moses' speech, the midrash states, “One might think that just as the measure of punishment extends over four generations, so also the measure of rewarding the good extends only over four generations. But Scripture says: ‘Unto thousands.’” According to the midrash, blessings do not cancel out punishments, but blessings last far longer. One might say cross-generational punishment and cross-generational blessing are twin expressions of God's justice and mercy, respectively, which operate simultaneously. Just as one can experience a hardship in a time of happiness, so too one can experience God's

¹⁰³⁰ For an explanation of *gezerah shavah*, see p. 274.

¹⁰³¹ The context of this passage is a series of instructions concerning the taking of Canaan. Israel is specifically told that when it confronts the other nations in the land, it must not make a covenant with them or show them mercy. It must also not intermarry with them, because intermarriage would cause Israel's children to commit idolatry.

¹⁰³² Deut 7:9 and Exod 20:6 have a high degree of shared language. The former states, שֹׁמֵר הַבְּרִית וְהַחֶסֶד לְאַהֲבָיו וְלִשְׂמֹרֵי מִצְוֹתוֹ לְאֶלֶף דּוֹר (“who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations”). Similarly, the latter states וְעָשָׂה חֶסֶד לְאֶלְפִים לְאַהֲבֵי וְלִשְׂמֹרֵי מִצְוֹתַי (“but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments”).

¹⁰³³ Interestingly, Deut 7:10 indicates that God “repays in their own person [אֶל־פָּנָיו] those who reject him. He does not delay but repays in their own person [אֶל־פָּנָיו] those who reject him.” This does not support cross-generational punishment. An individual is punished only for an individual's own sins. This midrash stops short of discussing a possible contradiction between Exod 20:6 and Deut 7:10.

justice amidst God's mercy. One does not exclude the other.¹⁰³⁴

5.6.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Augustine interprets Exod 20:5 in two ways: as a message regarding imitated sin and about inherited sin. As imitated sin, cross-generational punishment, according to Exod 20:5, is only applied to those “who hated me”—that is, the children who continue the sins of their parents. These children (Augustine expands this at one point to include anyone who imitates anyone else's sin) will receive their own punishment and the punishment of their parents. This will last for four generations. Augustine understands “generations” to mean “ages.” He then explains what these four ages are: 1) from Abraham to David; (2) David to Babylon; (3) Babylon to the birth of Christ; (4); from Christ to the end of the age.¹⁰³⁵ In other words, cross-generational punishment for imitated sin will persist until the eschaton. As inherited sin, cross-generational punishment refers to Original Sin. Augustine discusses this in the context of resolving a possible contradiction between Exod 20:5 and Deut 24:16. In their plain sense, the Exod 20:5 promotes cross-generational punishment, while Deut 24:16 indicates that only those who commit sins are guilty of those sins. Augustine's solution is that Exod 20:5 is referring to Original Sin, while Deut 24:16 is referring to sins committed after birth. In other words, Exod 20:5 states that everyone inherits Adam's Original Sin, while Deut 24:16 states that anyone who commits a sin after birth is solely responsible for that

¹⁰³⁴ See *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:15. This midrash presents a similar view to the one I suggest here: the rabbis argue that God chose to create the world with both justice and mercy. Had God only created the world with mercy, the sins of humanity would have overwhelmed the world. Had God only created the world with justice, it would have suppressed the world. Thus, both were necessary for the world to exist.

¹⁰³⁵ *C. Adim.* 7,1-2; *en. Ps.* 108.15.

sin.¹⁰³⁶

The evangelical commentators interpret Exod 20:5 in a similar way: as a message regarding either imitated sin or operative sin. Examples of the former include: the meaning of vv. 5-6 is that (1) God will only punish children who perpetuate the sins of their ancestors¹⁰³⁷; (2) the “bad habits” and scars of parents can easily leave an impression on future generations¹⁰³⁸; (3) how one lives can influence others to do likewise.¹⁰³⁹ Examples of the latter include: the “third and fourth generation” means (1) that sin will affect Israel in long-lasting ways¹⁰⁴⁰; (2) that what is passed down is the “genetic inheritance” from parent to child¹⁰⁴¹; (3) that four generations of families often lived together in the ANE, which means that four generations will be affected by one’s sin¹⁰⁴²; (4) that punishments of sin are not passed onto others, but everyone’s life is intimately bound to and influenced by all others.¹⁰⁴³

Augustine’s interpretations of imitated sin are largely the same as the evangelical commentators’. Where the evangelical commentators diverge is on the topic of inherited/operative sin. None of the evangelical commentators identify Original Sin as the “punishment” that is passed down through the generations in Exod 20:5. This is not because the evangelical commentators would reject the doctrine of Original Sin. On the contrary, while the doctrine is not essential to evangelical beliefs, it is accepted by the vast majority of evangelicals. One of the primary reasons why these commentators may

¹⁰³⁶ *Qu. hept.* Dt. 42. Whether circumstances change if a person imitates an ancestor’s sin is not discussed in relation to Deut 24:16.

¹⁰³⁷ Stuart, 454.

¹⁰³⁸ Roper, 326.

¹⁰³⁹ J. Janzen, 146-147.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Enns, 415-417.

¹⁰⁴¹ Motyer, 217.

¹⁰⁴² W. Janzen, 255-257.

¹⁰⁴³ J. Janzen, 146-147.

not have referenced Original Sin is out of a desire to ground their analysis in the original ANE context. Since Original Sin was not a known doctrine in the ANE world, the commentators do not refer to it. Instead, they propose ways in which Exod 20:5 speaks of operative sin, or sin that has a negative influence and effect on future generations.

The *Mekhilta* also makes no reference to Original Sin.¹⁰⁴⁴ The closest analogue is the evil inclination described in B.5. Augustine and the tannaitic literature would agree that both are within each individual, that both lead to ignorance of God and God's will, that both influence each person to sin. In addition, Augustine and the tannaitic literature would agree that both persist within an individual. For the rabbis, the evil inclination dwells with a person throughout his/her life. Meanwhile, for Augustine, baptism removes the guilt of Original Sin and redirects a person toward God, but the negative effects of Original Sin will remain.¹⁰⁴⁵ In addition to these similarities, there are various nuances in

¹⁰⁴⁴ There is a common understanding within Judaism that original sin is a purely Christian concept. As the Jewish scholar Jeremy Cohen writes, "From the early days of Christian history, the notion of original sin as deriving from Adam's fall and requiring the incarnation of God to atone for it—without which atonement man could not hope to merit salvation—constituted one of the sharpest lines of demarcation between Judaism and Christianity." See Jeremy Cohen, "Original Sin as the Evil Inclination—A Polemicist's Appreciation of Human Nature," *Harvard Theological Review* 73:3-4 (Dec 1980): 498. In depicting rabbinic anthropology, often b. Berakhot 61a is underscored, which states that God created within humanity a good inclination and an evil inclination. This is coupled with *Bereshit Rabbah* 9:7, which states that without the evil inclination, people would not build a home, marry, procreate, or do business. For more on the two inclinations, see footnote 957.

According to Samuel Cohon, the rabbinic landscape is actually much more complicated, as there exists a fair number of texts that discuss rabbinic anthropology in ways that possess strong resonances with Christian understandings of original sin. Here, I will list a few examples: (1) the serpent in the Garden of Eden had sexual intercourse with Eve, which infected the future of the human race (one text suggests the infection was concupiscence); this pollution was only uprooted from Israel at Sinai (e.g., see b. Yevamoth 103b; b. Avodah Zarah 22b; b. Shabbat 154b-146a). (2) The world fell into disorder after Adam's sin and will not be redeemed until the messiah arrives (see e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:5). (3) As a punishment for Adam's sin, humanity must suffer death (see e.g., b. Eruvin 18b; *Sifra Vayikra* 20:10; *Sifre Devarim* 323). See Samuel Cohon, "Original Sin," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 21(1948): 275-330.

See also Cohen, "Original Sin," 495-520 for a comparison between Augustinian and Thomistic notions of original sin, and an argument for a close symmetry between Thomistic and rabbinic anthropology.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Augustine's understanding of Original Sin in this section is drawn from Couenhoven, 359-396.

each position. Augustine believes Original Sin began with Adam and is received in each person through solidarity with Adam and transmission from the human father. The rabbis believe the evil inclination was implanted in each person by God, regardless of human sin, and is therefore neither transmitted nor in and of itself a sin. Augustine believes Original Sin causes a weakened human nature. The rabbis believe the evil inclination is bent on dissuading a person specifically from studying Torah. Augustine believes Original Sin disorders a person's desires (causing him/her to desire to sin) and creates ignorance, causing him/her to want to sin in a myriad of ways. The rabbis believe the evil inclination attempts to influence a person to find loopholes in Torah, which will lead to sin. The ways in which the tannaitic rabbis discuss the evil inclination's attempts to dissuade or control one's study of Torah and its persistence throughout one's life may offer ways in which one might reconsider the role and nature of Original Sin. What if one of the major effects of Original Sin is a desire to avoid the legal material of the Hebrew Bible? Such an idea is latent within Augustine. He states that on the one hand, Original Sin disorders a person's desires throughout his/her life and causes ignorance. He then states that on the other hand, after a person is baptized, his/her "fundamental orientation" is changed. This person "begins to delight in the law of God in the interior self."¹⁰⁴⁶ By "law," Augustine likely means the Decalogue or the double commandment. The rabbis, at this point, could help in expanding what in particular Original Sin targets, and what it means exactly to live a redeemed life. Perhaps one of the effects of Original Sin is to deemphasize or avoid all of the legal material of the Hebrew Bible, especially the parts that do not seem readily applicable. In baptism, then, when one undergoes a fundamental

¹⁰⁴⁶ Couenhoven, 379. See *nupt. et conc.* 1.30.33.

reorientation and begins to dispel ignorance, part of the process might be to cultivate the desire to study the legal material in all of its depths.

As for the matter of imitated sin, several of the evangelical commentators are motivated to explain a possible contradiction between Exod 20:5-6 and Deut 24:16; Ezekiel 18; Jer 31:29-30. While Exod 20:5-6 supports cross-generational punishment, the other three passages reject it. Stuart in particular uses the discrepancy to limit cross-generational punishment to only those who imitate their forbearers.¹⁰⁴⁷ While the *Mekhilta* does not engage in this canonical approach, the approach is not necessarily something the *Mekhilta* would be opposed to; moreover, the *Mekhilta*'s attempt to limit cross-generational punishment in the first, fourth, and fifth versions has strong resonances with the evangelical commentators' solutions and uneasiness about the motive clause. What each of the five versions of the *Mekhilta*'s midrash add to the conversation is a lucid display of the implications of limiting cross-generational punishment or not. Allowing a gap to cancel cross-generational punishment, as version one of the *Mekhilta* and several of the evangelical commentators do, communicates that God is concerned with sins becoming a trend. The threat of cross-generational punishment is designed to stop that trend. In contrast, allowing cross-generational punishment regardless of a gap, as the second and third versions of the *Mekhilta* do, communicates the seriousness of idolatry. It is a deeply egregious sin—to the extent that the punishment of one generation alone is not enough to make amends. Finally, allowing cross-generational punishment only when there is a skip in the generations communicates that the resumption of idolatry is far worse than a trend.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Stuart, 454.

5.7 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA B.11

Of Them that Love Me and Keep My Commandments. “Of them that love Me,” refers to our father Abraham and such as are like him. “And keep My commandments,” refers to the prophets and the elders. R. Nathan says: “Of them that love Me and keep My commandments,” refers to those who dwell in the land of Israel and risk their lives for the sake of the commandments.¹⁰⁴⁸ “Why are you being led out to be decapitated?” “Because I circumcised my son to be an Israelite.”¹⁰⁴⁹ “Why are you being led out to be burned?” “Because I read the Torah.” “Why are you being led out to be crucified?” “Because I ate the unleavened bread.” “Why are you getting a hundred lashes?” “Because I performed the ceremony of the Lulav.” And it says: “Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zech. 13.6). These wounds caused me¹⁰⁵⁰ to be beloved¹⁰⁵¹ of My father¹⁰⁵² in heaven.

This midrash has two sections. The first section seeks to identify the referents of לֹאֲהֵבִי (them that love me) and לְשָׁמְרִי מִצְוֹתַי (keep my commandments). While Exod 20:6 may have in mind the same referent for those who love God and keep God’s commandments,

¹⁰⁴⁸ Instead of על המצות (for the sake of the commandments), the Oxford manuscript has על כל המצות (for the sake of all of the commandments), while the Munich manuscript has בכל המצות (with all of the commandments). The two manuscripts make clear that those who risk their lives, not for some, but for *all* the commandments are the recipients of God’s חסד (lovingkindness).

¹⁰⁴⁹ The Oxford manuscript and the Horowitz-Rabin edition lack ישראל (Israelite). Lauterbach translates the phrase בני ישראל as “my son to be an Israelite.” An alternative is “sons of Israel.” Admittedly, translation of the text is difficult. The Oxford manuscript and Horowitz-Rabin edition allows for an easier translation: “because I circumcised my son.” This is also preferable because circumcision only creates Jewishness for a convert. Both this translation and Lauterbach’s assume that the one circumcising, or at least responsible for it, is the father, who is thus the target of the persecution. The alternative translation, “because I circumcised the sons of Israel,” would assume the circumcisor is someone else, perhaps a professional. The circumcision blessings in t. Berakhot 6:12 presume someone other than the father may perform the circumcision. If this is the case, then the target of the persecution is the one who performs circumcision.

¹⁰⁵⁰ The Oxford manuscript lacks לי (me), which makes the statement more general and less personal.

¹⁰⁵¹ Instead of ליאהב (to be beloved of), *Yalqut Shimoni* has לאהוב, while *Midrash Hakhhamim* has לאהב. *Yalqut Shimoni* is in the form of a Qal infinitive construct (to love). *Midrash Hakhhamim* may also be a Qal infinitive construct without the *matres lectionis*. As for ליאהב, this is a Niphal infinitive construct with a י in place of a ה, which is a common shift in rabbinic Hebrew. The Qal infinitive construct renders the sentence “These wounds cause me to love my father in heaven.” Underline mine.

¹⁰⁵² Instead of לאבי (by my father), the Oxford manuscript has לאביהם (by their father), while the Munich manuscript has לאבינו (by our father). The “our” in the Munich manuscript seems to be referring to anyone who is willing to practice Judaism in Israel. It is possible that לאבי is an abbreviation of לאביהם or לאבינו, and that the indication of the abbreviation was left out at some point.

in typical rabbinic exegesis, the *Mekhilta* reads repetitions or synonyms as referring to distinct entities. Thus, in our midrash, the *Mekhilta* understands “them that love God” as Abraham and anyone like him, and “keep my commandments” as the prophets and the elders.

In Genesis, we find in Abraham a willingness to: leave his own kin (12:1-10); enter into a covenant with God (15 and 17); accept a commandment to circumcise his descendants (17:9-14); and sacrifice his own son (22:1-19), to name but a few examples from his life. In rabbinic literature, Abraham takes on a role larger than life. In the *Mekhilta* alone, Abraham’s deeds are praised, and are seen to have elicited many of the blessings Israel has received. For example, Abraham’s splitting of the wood for the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:3) compels God to split the Red Sea for Israel.¹⁰⁵³ Even the smallest of Abraham’s deeds are treated in the same way. A midrash on Gen 18:1-18, the pericope in which Abraham is visited by three angels (the men are unidentified in the biblical text), teaches that the merit of Abraham’s deeds protect Israel in the wilderness. Abraham brings the angels water, so God brings up a well for Israel. Abraham has the men rest under a tree, so God spreads out seven clouds of glory over Israel (see Ps 105:39). Abraham brings the men bread, so God brings down manna for the Israelites.¹⁰⁵⁴ Abraham brings the men meat, so God sends quail to Israel. Abraham stands by the men while they eat, so God protects Israel during the plague of the firstborn

¹⁰⁵³ *Mekhilta Beshallah* 4. See also *Mekhilta Pesahim* 16 and *Beshallah* 2. In *Beshallah* 2, Abraham’s saddling of his donkey to sacrifice Isaac is compared to Balaam’s saddling of his donkey to curse Israel, and Abraham’s taking of the knife to sacrifice Isaac is compared to Pharaoh’s taking of his sword to pursue Israel in Exod 15:9. In both instances, Abraham’s actions stand out the brighter in the comparison; the midrash also seems to suggest that Abraham’s actions are what spared Israel on both counts.

¹⁰⁵⁴ See also *Mekhilta Vayassa* 3.

in Egypt.¹⁰⁵⁵ Abraham travels with the angels to Sodom, so God accompanies Israel for the forty years in the desert.¹⁰⁵⁶

Abraham also becomes a model for future generations. When the pharaoh draws near the Israelites at the Red Sea, the Israelites, in fear, turn to God in prayer (Exod 14:10). The midrash interprets this, citing Gen 12:8 and 24:6, as the Israelites remembering what Abraham always did—pray—which then inspires Israel to do the same.¹⁰⁵⁷ Our midrash can also be understood as promoting Abraham as a model: those who love God are those who are like Abraham; likewise, Abraham’s life exemplifies specific ways in which one can love God.

The prophets in our midrash likely refer to the biblical prophets (e.g., Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Jonah), while the elders either refers to the biblical elders¹⁰⁵⁸ or well-credentialed rabbinic Torah scholars.¹⁰⁵⁹ One of the more well-known rabbinic texts that involve the elders and prophets appears in the Mishnah: “Moses received the Torah from Sinai, and handed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets handed it to the men of the Great Assembly.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Here, the elders and prophets are understood as predecessors to the rabbis; they serve the role of keepers and transmitters of Torah. Two of the Gospels (Matt 15:2 and Mk 7:3-5) have resonance with the Mishnah, referencing the “tradition of the elders”—or rituals and commands passed down through the generations by certain elders of Israel. The elders and prophets appear once more in the *Mekhilta*, this time using the rebellion in the wilderness over the lack of

¹⁰⁵⁵ See also *Mekhilta Amaleq* 3.

¹⁰⁵⁶ *Mekhilta Beshallah* 1.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Mekhilta Beshallah* 3. Other rabbinic texts on Abraham’s deeds include m. Avot 5:3, *Sifre Devarim* 32, *Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:12, *Bereshit Rabbah* 38:13, and *Tanḥuma (Buber) Vayera* 46.

¹⁰⁵⁸ E.g., Exod 12:21; 24:1; Num 11:16

¹⁰⁵⁹ See Jastrow, 409.

¹⁰⁶⁰ m. Avot 1:1; translation mine.

water (i.e., Torah) for three days as a precedent for instituting the thrice-weekly reading of Torah (Sabbath, second day, and fifth day).¹⁰⁶¹ The elders and prophets here seem to be the same as those in the Mishnah, instituting a tradition that is later inherited by the rabbis. Admittedly, there is little information to help determine who the elders are in our midrash.¹⁰⁶² But the fact that the elders are placed after the prophets in our midrash may indicate that our midrash conceives of them following the prophets in chronological order. In the rabbinic understanding of history, the leadership role of the biblical elders ended before the rise of the monarchy. The role of the prophet ended with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.¹⁰⁶³ After the era of the prophets came the rise of the rabbis, among whom were elders, or well-credentialed rabbinic Torah scholars.¹⁰⁶⁴ Our midrash may have in mind prophets, and then their inheritors, the rabbis. But this is speculation. What *is* known is that while prophets and elders were certainly not seen as perfect,¹⁰⁶⁵ they did hold prominence in Israel. One rabbinic text ranks prophets above elders, and elders above rabbis.¹⁰⁶⁶ Both the elders and prophets were charged with keeping safe, transmitting, interpreting, and calling Israel to remain true to Torah. For reasons such as these, the *Mekhilta* identifies prophets and elders as those who “keep my commandments.”

¹⁰⁶¹ *Mekhilta Vayassa* 1.

¹⁰⁶² There are two other references to the “elders and prophets” in tannaitic literature (m. Yadayim 4:3 and *Sifre Devarim* 313), both of which do not seem to illuminate our midrash any further.

¹⁰⁶³ See m. Sotah 9:12; t. Sotah 13:3, and b. Sotah 48b. See also b. Megillah 14a for the number of prophets who existed in Israel’s history.

¹⁰⁶⁴ In addition, in rabbinic circles, if there were two rabbis with the same name, “elder” was applied to the older of the two rabbis to distinguish them. The term “elder” was also used in other circumstances: e.g., a leader of a community (m. Sanhedrin 11:2); a member of a court (b. Sotah 44b); and the older sibling (b. Yevamoth 39a).

¹⁰⁶⁵ E.g., *Mekhilta Pisha* 1 and m. Sanhedrin 1:5.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Bereshit Rabbah* 41(42):3. See also a parallel text in y. Sanhedrin 10:2 [28b]. Here, Ahab, the king of Israel during Elijah’s prophetic activity, strategizes the best way to undermine Israelite religion. He reasons that children lead to adults, who lead to sages, who in turn lead to prophets. In this logic, prophets are the most prominent. It should be noted that instead of “elders,” the Yerushalmi has הכמים (sages).

The next section is a comment by R. Nathan, who interprets “of them that love me and keep my commandments” as anyone choosing to live in Israel and practice the commandments, despite the threat of persecution. R. Nathan then lists four examples of persecutions Jews face for following certain commandments:

Commandment	Persecution
Circumcision	Execution (הרג) ¹⁰⁶⁷
Reading Torah	Burning (שרף)
Eating unleavened bread	Crucifixion (צלב)
Carrying the lulav	A hundred lashings by whip (לקה מאה פרגל) ¹⁰⁶⁸

In what follows, I will first discuss the meaning of each commandment individually, and then turn to the persecutions R. Nathan may have been responding to in his second century context.¹⁰⁶⁹ Circumcision, for the rabbis, was of upmost significance. R. Judah the Patriarch states in the Mishnah, “Great is circumcision, for [notwithstanding] all of the commandments that Abraham performed he was not called complete until he circumcised himself, as it is written, *walk before me, and be perfect* (Gen 17:1).”¹⁰⁷⁰ An anonymous comment in the Tosefta adds, “Great is circumcision, for it equals in value all the [other] commandments of the Torah, as it is written, *This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord [now makes with you concerning all these commands]* (Exod 24:8).¹⁰⁷¹

¹⁰⁶⁷ Lauterbach translates הרג as “decapitation.” The term is broader, meaning “execution,” but can include decapitation.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Lauterbach translates לוקה מאה פרגל as “getting a hundred lashes.” I have attempted a more literal, albeit wooden, translation.

¹⁰⁶⁹ As will become clear, I believe the origin of the midrash to be soon after the Bar Kokhbah revolt. At some point, it was incorporated into the *Mekhilta*.

¹⁰⁷⁰ M. Nedarim 3:11. Translation from Shaye Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 27. For an analysis of circumcision and identification of pertinent texts, I have relied on Cohen's work in this section.

¹⁰⁷¹ T. Nedarim 2:6. Translation from Cohen, *Jewish Women*, 27. Cohen notes that no other commandment in the Mishnah and Tosefta is called “great.” He then notes that many scholars believe the Mishnah and Tosefta's promotion of circumcision was a polemic against Christianity, which believed circumcision was no longer commanded. Cohen, however, believes the primary targets of these texts were Jews swayed toward Hellenism in the wake of the Bar Kokhbah revolt (*Jewish Women*, 27-28). More on the revolt and its significance for our midrash below.

Circumcision was performed eight days after birth for Jewish males, in accordance with Gen 17:12 and Lev 12:3. The Mishnah states that there are four necessary aspects of circumcision: (1) cutting the foreskin off; (2) tearing the remaining membrane away to reveal the corona; (3) sucking out the blood; and (4) bandaging the wound and applying cumin.¹⁰⁷² According to the Tosefta, the circumcisor, the father, and the community all recite separate texts at a circumcision. The circumcisor blesses, “Praised [be You, O Lord... who has commanded us] concerning circumcision.” The father blesses, “Praised [be You, O Lord... who has commanded us] to bring him [i.e., the child] into the covenant of Abraham our father.” And the community responds, “Just as you brought him into the covenant, so may you raise him for [the study of] Torah, marriage, and good deeds.”¹⁰⁷³ The blessings presume an infant circumcision, or at least a circumcision before the boy’s bar mitzvah. As the father’s blessing indicates, circumcision enters the boy into the covenant; it does not make him Jewish. He is already Jewish by virtue of being born from a Jewish mother.¹⁰⁷⁴ However, ritual circumcision *is* required for a male gentile who wishes to convert to Judaism.¹⁰⁷⁵

The reading of Torah, in the context of the midrash, means a public reading of Torah. This seems to have been the primary function of the early synagogue. From at least the beginning of the common era, Torah was read, at the very least, on Sabbaths. By

¹⁰⁷² M. Shabbat 19:2, 6. For a fuller analysis of this process, see Cohen, *Jewish Women*, 24-26. Cohen notes that the Bible itself does not specify how much of the foreskin must be removed, and argues that the rabbis were the first to require that both the foreskin be removed and that the corona be fully revealed. Cohen speculates that this was done to prevent Hellenizing Jews from attempting to reverse the circumcision through a procedure known as epispasm.

¹⁰⁷³ T. Berakhot 6:12. Translation by Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew with a New Introduction*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Henderickson Publishers, 2002), 40-41. For an overview and historical survey of the ceremony of circumcision, known as the brit milah, see Ivan G. Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), 30-81.

¹⁰⁷⁴ See m. Qiddushin 3:12.

¹⁰⁷⁵ See t. Avodah Zarah 3:12.

at least the second century, some communities began reading the Torah continuously, from beginning to end. According to the Mishnah, the Torah is read every Monday, Thursday, and Sabbath during the afternoon, and every Sabbath during the morning.¹⁰⁷⁶ It must be read all the way through, with no passages omitted. Three different people are to read the Torah on Mondays, Thursdays, and Sabbath afternoons. On the New Moon, the number is four; on festival days, it is five; on Yom Kippur, it is six; and on Sabbath mornings, it is seven. The first and last readers both recite a blessing.¹⁰⁷⁷

The eating of the מצה (unleavened bread) is a clear reference to the observance of Passover. The eating of unleavened bread is commanded in Exod 12:8, 18; Deut 16:3, 8 and was one of the primary symbolic foods of the holiday from the biblical period onward. Details of the earliest rabbinic Passover seder are found in m. Pesahim 10 and t. Pesahim 10. The Mishnah presents a ritual that attempts to compensate for the loss of the central element of the Passover—the Passover sacrifice¹⁰⁷⁸—while simultaneously giving the impression that this newly constructed rabbinic ritual is not new at all, but has always been practiced. The unleavened bread, coupled with the מרור (bitter herbs), are eaten with the paschal sacrifice in Exod 12:8 and Num 9:11.¹⁰⁷⁹ In the Mishnah and Tosefta, the unleavened bread and מרור are made central to the entire ritual, gaining the same

¹⁰⁷⁶ M. Megilla 3:6-4:2. Cf. *Mekhilta Vayassa* 1.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Here, I follow the analysis of Charles Perrot, “The Reading of the Bible in the Ancient Synagogue,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, eds. Marin J. Mulder and Harry Sysling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 137-160. See the rest of his article for descriptions of pre-70 and post-Mishnaic traditions of reading the Bible. Perrot also discusses the development of the triennial and annual reading cycles.

See also b. Megillah 21b. According to this text, the practice was eventually changed so that each reader recites a blessing before and after reading the Torah.

¹⁰⁷⁸ E.g., the Mishnah’s Passover seder starts in the evening, during the same hour as the sacrificial meal.

¹⁰⁷⁹ M. Pesahim 10:3 and t. Pesahim 10:9 also discuss חרוסת, a sweet dip that serves as another ritual food. Both texts include a dispute over whether it is commanded, like the matza and maror; the majority understand it not to be.

importance as the Passover sacrifice itself. The rabbinic texts argue that even without the sacrifice, one can still perform the rituals of מצה and מרור, and thus still celebrate Passover.¹⁰⁸⁰

Finally, the לולב.¹⁰⁸¹ The commandment to celebrate the festival of Sukkot (commemorating the wilderness wandering) with the לולב (palm branch) is found in Lev 23:40. Similar to Passover, the rabbis were faced with the question of how to continue Sukkot without the Temple. The rabbis' solution was to focus on the sukkah and the לולב, two ritual elements that did not require the Temple.¹⁰⁸² The lulav was originally only practiced at the Temple. However, R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai established that it was to thenceforth be taken up (נטל) by local communities each day of the seven-day festival.¹⁰⁸³ The Tannaitic sources go into great detail about the ritual accoutrements and the practice itself of taking up the lulav. To list some of the most salient aspects, the lulav is part of a bouquet, composed of the lulav itself (a palm frond whose leaves have not yet spread), along with willow branches, myrtle branches, and an etrog (citron).¹⁰⁸⁴ The lulav is to be shaken during precise moments, though the exact moments were a matter of debate.¹⁰⁸⁵

¹⁰⁸⁰ See Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 29-49. Bokser includes the texts from the Mishnah and Tosefta, and analyzes the other elements of the rabbinic Passover seder.

Scholars today see no association between the Rabbinic Passover seder that emerged in the late first century CE and the "Last Supper"; thus, one cannot be used to understand the other. The Gospels do not recount any details about the meal that would make it distinctly a Passover seder. Moreover, the variations in the dating of the meal in the gospels (the day before Passover according to the Synoptic Gospels, and two days before according to John) calls into question what this meal originally was. See Bokser, 25-26.

¹⁰⁸¹ Here, I rely on Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *The History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 152-159, 169-171, 181-203.

¹⁰⁸² Ritual elements that did require the Temple were the sacrifices, *simhat beit hashoeva* (rejoicing at the location where the water is drawn), the willow procession (which entered the synagogue), and libations. See Rubenstein, *Sukkot*, 181.

¹⁰⁸³ M. Sukkah 3:12.

¹⁰⁸⁴ The four elements are first listed together in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews* 3:244-47. See also m. Sukkah 3:4; t. Sukkah 2:7-10.

¹⁰⁸⁵ M. Sukkah 3:9.

According to Beit Hillel, one shakes the lulav at three moments during a recitation of Psalm 118¹⁰⁸⁶; according to Beit Shammai, at four moments¹⁰⁸⁷; and according to Rabban Gamliel and R. Yehoshua, only once.¹⁰⁸⁸ The Yerushalmi states that when one shakes the lulav, one must do it three times.¹⁰⁸⁹ R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai said the purpose of the lulav was to remember the Temple. According to other rabbis, the lulav was understood as both a “fertility symbol” and “rain charm.” R. Aqiva believed that Sukkot needed to be celebrated correctly, or else the rain would not come,¹⁰⁹⁰ while R. Eliezer argued that the lulav compelled God to bring rain.¹⁰⁹¹

The midrash’s choice of these four commandments may be driven by their public nature, the distinct Jewishness of each symbol, and the literary symmetry between symbol and punishments. Each positive religious action is met in kind with a far more extreme negative consequence. While circumcision removes a tiny part of a human body, execution (perhaps by decapitation) removes an entire human life. While Torah is symbolically related to fire,¹⁰⁹² those who read it are burned (presumably to death). While unleavened bread is a symbol of freedom gained, crucifixion is the instrument often used

¹⁰⁸⁶ Before and after the v. 1 and at v. 25.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Before and after v. 1, and twice at the beginning and middle of v. 25.

¹⁰⁸⁸ At v. 25. This is according to R. Aqiva’s observation.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Y. Sukkah 3:10 [53d]. Other mentions of shaking the lulav are found in m. Sukkah 3:1, 15; t. Ḥagigah 1:2 and t. Berakhot 3:19.

¹⁰⁹⁰ T. Sukkot 3:18.

¹⁰⁹¹ B. Taanit 2b.

Jn 12:13 records that people took palm branches to greet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. The so-called “triumphal entry” occurs several days before Passover, which takes place six or seven months after Sukkot, depending on the year. Whatever is being celebrated here seems to be impromptu or another ritual. Interestingly, in the parallel accounts in Mk 11:9, Matt 21:9, and Lk 19:38 the crowds quote Ps 118:26, “blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” The presence of the palm branches and the Psalm quote seem to be the result of conflation or possibly confusion about the rituals of Passover and Sukkoth.

¹⁰⁹² *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 4 states, “the Torah is fire, was given from the midst of fire, and is comparable to fire. What is the nature of fire? If one comes too near to it, one gets burnt. If one keeps too far from it, one is cold. The only thing for man to do is to seek to warm himself against its flame.” Meanwhile, *Bahodesh* 5 states, “To three things the Torah is likened: to the desert, to fire, and to water.” Emphasis mine.

to suppress revolts.¹⁰⁹³ Finally, Roman whips, with several thongs attached to a single handle, could look visually similar to a palm tree.¹⁰⁹⁴

According to R. Nathan, the one who is willing to endure such wounds on account of following the commandments are “beloved of My father in heaven.”¹⁰⁹⁵ R. Nathan then quotes Zech 13:6.¹⁰⁹⁶ It is likely R. Nathan has the full context of Zechariah in mind, seeing in it a description of rabbinic history and a prophecy of the world to come. In Zech 13:3-5, the speaker states that the role of the prophet is coming to an end; those who would be prophets now till the soil. As noted above, according to the rabbis, prophecy ended with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.¹⁰⁹⁷ Those who would have become prophets now become rabbis and followers of rabbis. The rabbis, in this way, are heirs of the

¹⁰⁹³ Martin Hengel writes of crucifixion in Rome, “Crucifixion was also a means of waging war and securing peace, of wearing down rebellious cities under siege, of breaking the will of conquered peoples and of bringing mutinous troops or unruly provinces under control.” See Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 46. The association of crucifixion and suppression of rebellion perhaps gained a stronger association for R. Nathan after the failure of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The comparison between unleavened bread and crucifixion has a noticeable parallel with the Gospels, in which Jesus eats unleavened bread with his disciples before his own crucifixion. It is tempting to speculate that R. Nathan’s midrash is a response to the Jesus-movement; however, it seems to me that literary symmetry was R. Nathan’s intent, and that the parallel is incidental.

¹⁰⁹⁴ The ruling in t. Sukkah 2:7 that the palm frond have no separation in its leaves indicates that there were instances in which palm fronds with separated leaves or in the shape of a fan were used as lulavs.

¹⁰⁹⁵ See footnotes 1051-1052 for variations in textual witnesses. According to some, the wounds cause a person to love God, while others have the giver of love “fathers” (perhaps the patriarchs), instead of “father” (God).

¹⁰⁹⁶ The context of the quote (Zechariah 13-14) is the foretelling of a series of events, beginning with a fountain that will open for the house of David and the Jerusalemites to purify and cleanse them (13:1). God will remove all idols from the land (13:2). Prophecy will also end. Those who would have become prophets will become tillers of the soil on the land they own (13:2-5). At this point comes Zech 13:6: “And if anyone asks them, ‘What are these wounds on your chest?’ the answer will be ‘The wounds I received in the house of my friends.’” R. Nathan quotes the second half of 13:6. Zechariah then transitions into a poem, centered on God’s sending destruction to God’s people; two thirds will die, and one third will survive. This one third God will refine through testing (13:7-9). Zechariah, in chapter 14, seems to give a prose description of the poem. God will send all nations against Jerusalem. The city will fall, and half will go into exile, while the other half will remain (14:1-5). Then God will return, and reclaim not just the city, but the entire world. Jerusalem will never fall again (14:5-11). A plague will hit the world (14:12-15), and those who survive will come to Jerusalem every year to observe the festival of Sukkot (14:16). Those who do not will receive no rain (14:17-21).

¹⁰⁹⁷ See m. Sotah 9:12; t. Sotah 13:3, and b. Sotah 48b.

prophets.¹⁰⁹⁸

The cataclysmic event that is to befall Jerusalem in Zech 13:7-14:5 is understood by the midrash to be referring to the Bar Kokhbah Revolt. The revolt lasted between approximately 132-136 CE, which would have occurred around the same time of R. Nathan's activity as a third generation tannaitic rabbi, if he indeed was the tradent of our midrash.

In Zech 13:8, two thirds are cut off during the cataclysm and die; in Zech 14:2, half the survivors are exiled from Jerusalem, while the rest stay. Based on Jewish and Roman sources, Menahem Mor observes that scholars often believe the Jewish population in Israel, after the revolt, fell to less than half of what it was before the revolt.¹⁰⁹⁹ While there is not enough data to confirm this view,¹¹⁰⁰ what *is* known is that Hadrian turned Jerusalem into a Roman colony and named it after himself, Aelia Capitolina. Hadrian also brought in non-Jews to occupy the land. According to Eusebius and Hieronymus, Jews were barred from living in or around Jerusalem. Whether or not this was an actual prohibition, it seems that many Jews also refused to live in Jerusalem after it was turned into a pagan colony. Some, however, chose to remain, one such group being a band of sages known as the "Holy Community of Jerusalem." In addition to Jerusalem, only the people and areas that participated in the revolt received punishment or were destroyed. Those Jews who fled these areas relocated foremost in the Galilee, which had not participated in the revolt and thus was unscathed.¹¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁹⁸ As noted above, in m. Avot 1:1, the prophets transmitted the Torah to the Men of the Great Assembly, who then transmitted it to the earliest proto-rabbis.

¹⁰⁹⁹ E.g., y. Taanit 4:8 [68d] and Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 69:14.

¹¹⁰⁰ The actual population of Israel at the time cannot be confirmed, either before or after the revolt. The available sources also give the impression of exaggeration.

¹¹⁰¹ Menahem Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 468-485.

As for religious life after the war, according to Gedaliah Alon, the Jews living in Israel received the status of *dediticii*, a status given to conquered peoples, depriving them of civil rights and protections. This allowed local authorities, such as governor Tinneus Rufus, to impose a series of decrees prohibiting certain aspects of Jewish practice, including public Torah reading, and other public gatherings (viz., the three pilgrimage festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot).¹¹⁰² It should be noted, though, that Alon's work, published between 1954-1955, only uses rabbinic texts as evidence. There are no known non-rabbinic documents that corroborate these sources. There has been a major methodological shift in Jewish studies in recent decades, calling for circumspection when there is a lack of corroborating evidence or conflicting reports. A case in point, Aharon Oppenheimer, writing in 2003, argues against the prevailing view that the Bar Kokhbah revolt began because of a ban placed on circumcision by Hadrian. Oppenheimer argues that from the available rabbinic and Roman sources, the most that can be said about the matter is that the evidence does not support the ban as a cause for the revolt, but it is possible a ban was imposed as a consequence of it.¹¹⁰³ Seth Schwartz points out,

¹¹⁰² Gedaliah Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age (70-640 CE)*, Vol. 2, ed. and trans. Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1984), 632-637.

¹¹⁰³ The evidence from Roman sources is found in two places. The first is Hadrian's *Digesta* 48:8:4:2, which outlaws castration. However, Oppenheimer points out the law does not explicitly identify circumcision. The second source is Modestinus' *The Rules*, Book VI, written after the revolt, which states that Antoninus Pius has allowed Jews to circumcise only their sons. Scholars argue that the decree is counteracting a prohibition on circumcision that was enacted before the revolt. Oppenheimer argues the law forbids converts from receiving circumcision. It is possible, Oppenheimer goes on to argue, that the decree does lift a ban on circumcision, but whether that ban was placed before or after the revolt is not clear. See Aharon Oppenheimer, "The Ban on Circumcision as a Cause of Revolt: A Reconsideration," in *The Bar Kokhba War Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 56-57. Some point to *Historia Augusta, Vita Hadriana* 14.2 as indicating the Bar Kokhbah revolt was begun because circumcision was outlawed. Oppenheimer shows that this is not a convincing argument, as the text never mentions circumcision and seems to be written as slander. Others point to rabbinic sources as evidence (e.g., m. Shabbat 19:1 and b. Shabbat 130a); however, Oppenheimer shows that these sources are describing the reality after the failure of the Bar Kokhbah revolt. Oppenheimer does state that texts like these, along with our present midrash, indicate that there was *possibly* a ban on circumcision as a result of the revolt. See Oppenheimer, 55-69. See also Mor, 129-135.

however, that Hadrian placed the ban on anyone who practiced circumcision, which included not only Jews, but Egyptian priests and other Arab groups. It could very well be, Schwartz speculates, that the ban was a punishment for Jews *or* was simply a coincidence, occurring shortly after the Bar Kokhbah revolt.¹¹⁰⁴

Alon argues that Tineius Rufus' decrees were not attempts to stamp out the Jewish religion; rather, they were meant to suppress future attempts at rebellion. Regardless, some rabbinic sources perceive the former was the focus, referring to this period as בשעת סכנה (the time of danger).¹¹⁰⁵ R. Judah recalls transferring the Torah on rooftops and reading it there (apparently in secret).¹¹⁰⁶ In Zech 13:6, the verse quoted in our midrash, the speaker explains how he received the wounds on his chest. R. Nathan interprets this explanation to mean that these wounds are the result of the persecution some rabbis and their followers experienced—or at least *perceived*—after the revolt ended.¹¹⁰⁷ Mor argues that even if Alon's assessment is correct, the decrees were “merely passing phenomena”; they were ended by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE),¹¹⁰⁸ and Judaism revitalized quickly in Israel.¹¹⁰⁹ Judaism's return, though, Mor states, was marked by a change: now, those who practiced Judaism held a “passive

¹¹⁰⁴ Seth Schwartz, *The Ancient Jews from Alexander to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 97.

¹¹⁰⁵ M. Shabbat 19:1; t. Eruvin 5:24; b. Shabbat 130a. See also Oppenheimer, 58-62.

¹¹⁰⁶ T. Eruvin 5:24.

¹¹⁰⁷ The original meaning of Zech 13:6 may have been a reference to the self-inflicted wounds some prophets would undergo. In Zechariah, ex-prophets would remove the garments covering their chest while working in the field, and then be asked how they received those wounds. R. Nathan chooses to interpret this text as a reference to the rabbis and their followers. They receive wounds for following the commandments of Torah.

¹¹⁰⁸ It is worth noting that Antoninus allowed the circumcision of Jews, but not non-Jews, which meant that converts to Judaism could not be circumcised. See Schwartz, *Ancient Jews*, 97.

¹¹⁰⁹ Cf. Alon, 641-680. Alon is of the view that Jews remained in the status of *dediticii*, and because of this, the rebuilding of Judaism and Jewish institutions were stifled until the end of the century. Moreover, he believes sources like our present midrash show that Antoninus was slow in lifting the decrees.

attitude” toward Roman rule.¹¹¹⁰ A prominent example of this is that before the revolt, there existed two messianic views, one which held that Jews could help bring the messianic age through war, and another which awaited its arrival. The failed revolt caused the second view to win out. Mor believes it is this passive attitude that allowed the religion and Jewish life to return so quickly.¹¹¹¹

In light of the historical data, R. Nathan’s midrash fits in well with the “time of danger” after the revolt ended. He speaks of a clear and present threat—whether real or perceived—in practicing Judaism in Israel, particularly those acts which were public in nature. The artistry and cadence of R. Nathan’s words can serve as a powerful motivating force in such a harrowing situation for “those who dwell in the land of Israel.” In addition, the text can be seen as a response to a growing fear among rabbis that Jews were abandoning Israel, with many headed toward the east. According to Isaiah Gafni, tannaitic Palestinian rabbis living after the revolt sought to convince Jews to remain in the Land by arguing that Jews were barred from emigrating from it, and that simply living in the Land was equal to all of the *mitzvot*.¹¹¹² Willem Smelik sees our midrash as

¹¹¹⁰ Mor points to b. Ketuboth 111a and t. Sanhedrin 98:1-2 as evidence.

¹¹¹¹ Schwartz, taking a more minimalist position, argues that from the available archaeological evidence in the Galilee and the areas near it, many of the Jews living after the revolt became less Jewish and more romanized, adopting aspects of both Greco-Roman culture and religion. See footnote 970. In addition to the reasons for the romanization of these areas mentioned in footnote 970, it would seem Jews living in the Galilee were painfully aware of what resistance to Rome would cost them, and chose a more passive route for the sake of survival. See also Schwartz, *Ancient Jews*, 104-105, 110-118.

¹¹¹² Isaiah Gafni, *Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 65-71. See also t. Avodah Zarah 4:3 on rabbinic arguments to stay in the Land. Gafni claims that arguments for the superiority and necessity of the Land were a distinct phenomenon among Palestinian rabbis living after the Bar Kokhbah revolt. No Hellenistic Jewish sources or pre-Bar Kokhbah rabbinic texts portrayed the Land in such elevated terms. Gafni also emphasizes that calls to remain in the Land were nothing more than a response to a strong belief that Jewish population in the Land was declining and could possibly end altogether. They were *not* new forms of messianism. Hopes for an imminent, active messianism ended with the revolt and were strongly discouraged thereafter (e.g., see t. Avodah Zarah 1:19). See Gafni, 60-66, 71-73, 78.

among these rabbinic texts that sought to convince Jews to remain.¹¹¹³ Our midrash in particular seeks to assuage a desire to flee the Land to avoid persecutions in the form of physical suffering or death—by arguing that if either *were* to occur, long-lasting blessings would result.

If indeed the persecutions ended quickly under Antoninus, resulting in the quick revitalization of Judaism, what continued purpose would R. Nathan's midrash hold? Why preserve it? One reason might be to help counter the rise of Babylonian rabbinic influence. A major consequence of the failed Bar Kokhbah Revolt was the elevation of Babylonia as a second, competing center of rabbinic leadership. Gafni argues that the rabbinic emphasis on Torah scholarship over the priesthood and sacrificial system after the loss of the Second Temple meant that influence and prestige could manifest in any geographic location, not just Israel. One such location was Babylonia. In an effort to maintain control, Palestinian amoraic rabbis from the third century on elevated the significance and necessity of the Land even further than the tannaitic rabbis, asserting, for example, that the calendar and rabbinic ordination could only be determined in the Land.¹¹¹⁴ As part of the Palestinian rabbinic effort to maintain dominance, our midrash could be seen as arguing that only those who live in the Land and give their lives to the commandments—even if it leads to suffering or death—will receive God's blessing for their posterity.

There is another reason. Reuven Hammer discusses the evolution of the story of

¹¹¹³ Willem Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 434. E.g., see also *Sifre Devarim* 80.

¹¹¹⁴ Gafni, 96-116. Meanwhile, the Babylonian rabbis countered the Palestinian rabbis by arguing that Babylonia was “a precise copy” of the Land. See Gafni, 116. Among his evidence, Gafni points to b. Gittin 6a; b. Bava Kama 80a.

R. Aqiva's martyrdom. It begins with a relatively straightforward account,¹¹¹⁵ and eventually turns into an elaborate retelling.¹¹¹⁶ R. Aqiva had been one of the Bar Kokhbah revolt's strongest supporters. According to these stories, R. Aqiva was martyred while reciting Shema (Deut 6:4) under the hands of Tineius Rufus (the governor of Judea) as the revolt was winding down. The purpose of retelling his story in its various permutations, Hammer argues, was to "glorify martyrdom," promoting it as the ultimate expression of the Shema, the greatest way to show love and loyalty to God.¹¹¹⁷ In a similar way, one continued purpose for our present midrash might have been to honor those who died as a result of their devotion to the commandments. They truly exemplified "them that love me and keep my commandments." In this way, they serve as a standard to live up to: if one really wants to love God and keep the commandments, this is the extent to which one must be willing to go. Moreover, though one may not face danger now, that does not mean one might not face it later; thus, one must be ready for this possibility, and it is a midrash like this that will prepare one.

The midrash may also provide an enduring source of both community-building and messianic anticipation. If one follows these commandments, one becomes identified with the community of those who risked or gave their lives as the ultimate expression of devotion toward God. One feels the danger, the pride, the catharsis, and the reward that those who went before experienced. This is a type of religious devotion that is harnessed in extremity. It goes beyond rulings, as stated in the Bavli, which allow transgression of all commandments when threatened with death, except idolatry, sexual immorality, and

¹¹¹⁵ Y. Berakhot 9:7 [14b] and y. Sotah 5:7 [20c].

¹¹¹⁶ B. Berakhot 61b and b. Menahot 29b.

¹¹¹⁷ Reuven Hammer, *Akiva: Life, Legend, Legacy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015), 167-176.

murder.¹¹¹⁸ It does not actively seek death, but it is ready to receive it for the sake of devotion to God. As a text of messianic expectation, the midrash points to Zechariah 14 and its apocalyptic descriptions of a redeemed Israel, where idolatry has ended and all nations participate in Sukkot.¹¹¹⁹ Without explicitly stating this, the midrash points to this messianic age subtly by citing Zech 13:6. R. Nathan could have chosen any number of passages in the Bible that reference suffering, and yet he chose Zech 13:6. By doing this, the midrash is hinting that the messianic age will come, and that God will bring it (Zech 14:6). In the meantime, one is to keep practicing the commandments in the land, a constant test that will refine one in the end (Zech 13:9).

5.7.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The Christian commentaries generally spend less time on the cross-generational blessings (Exod 20:6) of the motive clause than the cross-generational punishments (Exod 20:5b). Augustine never seems to address it specifically, but does state in one place that if one imitates good people, past sins will be forgiven.¹¹²⁰ One might extrapolate from this that at least part of the blessing promised in the motive clause is forgiveness of sins. Among the evangelical commentators, Hamilton states that cross-generational blessing means that if one observes the commandments, one will receive a blessing for oneself and also one's descendants. Hamilton then gives several biblical

¹¹¹⁸ B. Sanhedrin 74a and b. Ketuboth 111a. Mor believes this position was formulated in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhbeh revolt (Mor, 478).

¹¹¹⁹ The end of idolatry has clear resonance with Exod 20:3-6, the commandment that this midrash is commenting on, and the practice of sukkot has clear resonance with the appearance of sukkot on R. Nathan's list of dangerous Jewish practices.

¹¹²⁰ *En. Ps.* 108.15

examples (e.g., Noah's obedience leads to the salvation of his family, and Abraham's obedience leads to Israel obtaining the Land).¹¹²¹ For Enns, the phrase "thousands of generations" in Exod 20:6 means that obedience will positively affect Israel for a very long time, perhaps infinitely.¹¹²² Dozeman points out that cross-generational blessing indicates that human and divine love are reciprocal: when humans love God, God loves humans in return.¹¹²³ Stuart argues that the contrast between "third and fourth generation" with cross-generational punishment and "thousands of generations" with cross-generational blessing reveals God's actual desire, which is not to punish people, but to bless them.¹¹²⁴

In contrast, the *Mekhilta* spends more time on cross-generational blessings than it does on cross-generational punishments. For the Christian commentators, one of the primary reasons for the opposite emphasis seems to be that the concept of cross-generational punishment requires more explanation, since not only is the concept disturbing, but other texts in the Hebrew Bible would appear to contradict it. Despite the fact that cross-generational punishment receives more exegetical attention, though, commentators like Stuart make clear that cross-generational blessing is far more theologically significant. If we seek to mitigate the imbalance of attention in the Christian commentaries, we can find in the *Mekhilta* interpretations that can further the exegesis on Exod 20:6 that the Christian commentators have begun. One particular hermeneutical principle the *Mekhilta* employs that can serve toward this end is identifying different referents for "those who love me" and those who "keep my commandments." Evangelical

¹¹²¹ Hamilton, 333-334.

¹¹²² Enns, 415-416.

¹¹²³ Dozeman, 485-486.

¹¹²⁴ Stuart, 454.

commentary has a tendency to read the latter as a modifier of the former and to approach similar constructions throughout the Bible in the same way. In actuality, the biblical text does not require that exegetical move. The *Mekhilta*'s approach invites an evangelical to consider different possible referents for each phrase, thereby extending the meaning of the text and the scope of the blessing. Abraham, for example, did not receive the Torah, and so his primary option was to love God. Meanwhile, the elders and prophets *did* receive the commandments, which gave them a different mission on earth. An evangelical might extend this approach to other biblical characters, and could even extend it to people outside the Bible.

R. Nathan's teaching that one's devotion to God may require the sacrifice of one's life does not directly offer evangelicals new insight. Many evangelicals are well aware of the lives of Christian martyrs throughout history and of the centrality of martyrdom in Christian self-understanding. However, for some, it may be a surprise that martyrologic literature does exist in Judaism, and that one of its uses is to encourage future generations. The ways in which this literature describes the meaning and purpose of martyrdom may also provide fresh ways to think about Christian martyrdom. On the one hand, R. Nathan's statement can serve as an intensification for Christians, providing a source of renewed or reinforced commitment to one's devotion to God.¹¹²⁵ On the other hand, R. Nathan's midrash exposes a certain irony about martyrdom and creates a connection between martyrdom and Exod 20:6 that may not have been completely

¹¹²⁵ I draw the concept of intensification from Catherine Cornille. According to Cornille, intensification is among six different modes of learning a comparative theologian might utilize in his/her comparative learning. With intensification, similarities across religious traditions lead to a greater appreciation, reaffirmation, or commitment to a belief or practice in one's own tradition. See Cornille, 116-118. See the conclusion to this dissertation for more on Cornille's modes of comparative learning.

obvious before. Each of R. Nathan's examples possesses a literary symmetry between symbol and punishment. For example, circumcision, or the removal of foreskin, is matched by the removal of one's life. The irony is that while the Romans believe their punishment is far greater, Exod 20:6 shows that the greatest consequence of all is the blessing that will follow from the martyrdom—a blessing that will extend to a thousand generations. Indeed, one clear sign that blessings *do* ensue is that the lives R. Nathan speaks of are still remembered two thousand years later, instilling both inspiration and encouragement.

5.8 CONCLUSION FOR SECOND WORD

In the *Mekhilta's* treatment of Exod 20:3-6, we see an acute awareness of the perils a monotheistic tradition faces in a polytheistic world, a world that has proven it will not recede any time soon. The temptation to succumb to idolatry, whether through deliberate willingness or woeful naivety, is profound. It requires constant vigilance. Every potential exception to the Decalogue's ban on idolatry must be ruled out, lest one be caught off guard. One cannot make (B.5) or own (B.2) an idol; that much is clear. But the ban goes much further: one cannot even own representational artwork (B.5), lest it leave an unintended opening.

The danger, however, is not present in the world alone, but in the Torah itself. Indeed, unless one is careful, the evil inclination can interpret biblical texts to justify idolatrous practices or beliefs. And so, the *Mekhilta* works diligently to demonstrate how the Torah prevents every potential reading of biblical texts that might support idolatry.

“Other gods” in Exod 20:3 are not actually gods (B.3), nor does zealotry in Exod 20:5 imply that these idols have any power (B.9). The prohibition on idolatry applies to Israel of every generation, not just those who left Egypt (B.4), and the prohibition includes all forms of obeisance, whether it be service or prostration (B.6-7). And if one should ask what gives God the right to ban idolatry, the Torah points to Egypt (or Sinai), the place where Israel entered willingly into a covenant with God (B.1).

The *Mekhilta* is also aware that its monotheistic views are prone to scrutiny and ridicule from outsiders, which could wear away at a one’s commitment to monotheism. Why believe in a petty God who becomes jealous, when there are better philosophies and religious beliefs that would eschew such limited views? The *Mekhilta* not only attempts to explain that God is not petty (B.8), but it seeks to demonstrate that the Bible and the rabbis can stand up against such claims, entering confidently into debates with non-Jewish intellectuals, and emerge still confident of their beliefs (B.9).

Idolatry is one of the gravest of matters. Even in a world where idolatry is rampant and mundane, there can be no leniency. The *Mekhilta* is unafraid to admit this, and though the *Mekhilta* tempers the potential severity of the punishment for idolatry, it does not shy away from this either. This is in part because the biblical text does not allow the total dissipation of punishment, and in part because the theological implications of such a stringent position is monumental. One can explain the stringency in sociological terms, where firm boundaries protect a minority group from total assimilation. But what is also at stake for the *Mekhilta* is theological: idolatry raises the basic question of whether one will follow God or someone else. For those who choose to remain monotheistic, even in the face of death, the *Mekhilta* underscores that the reward is

inexplicable (B.10-11). The *Mekhilta*'s motivation, then, is punishment *and* reward. Both are essential if dedication is to endure.

Among the many questions an evangelical is left with after studying the *Mekhilta*'s exegesis is the relationship between punishment and forgiveness. The Decalogue's cross-generational punishment can seem excessive. Many of the evangelical commentators attempt to show that it is not as harsh as it initially seems. These interpretations can offer a degree of solace. But perhaps the greatest source of mollification is found in Christ's sacrifice. This sacrifice brings forgiveness of all sins, so long as one accepts it—and for many, receives baptism and continues to repent of any sins¹¹²⁶ after baptism. There is a tendency to believe that forgiveness includes the cessation of punishment, that when Christ forgives all sins, this also means one will not face punishment.¹¹²⁷ This applies to every punishment laid out in the Hebrew Bible, including the cross-generational punishment described in Exod 20:5.

The complete cancellation of punishment is attractive for a number of reasons, not least of which it is befitting of a loving and gracious God. In some ways the very idea of punishment seems unavoidably attached to a works-righteousness system of justice, where violations require restitution, restitution inspires fear, fear motivates righteousness, and righteousness leads to eternal life. The coming of Christ does away with this system, and by granting a person access to heaven by grace, one is no longer motivated out of fear, but love. Some of the versions of the *Mekhilta* also seek to temper the potency of Exod 20:5, withholding cross-generational punishment if there is a skip in generations

¹¹²⁶ Either by oneself, with another or others, or as a sacrament of reconciliation.

¹¹²⁷ There exists an act of penance in some Christian traditions. This act shares some similarities with the *Mekhilta*'s view of punishment, but is nevertheless distinct from it. E.g., see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1459-1460.

(version 1) or if there is not (versions 4-5). But whichever version one chooses, none of them foreclose the possibility of (cross-generational) punishment for the perpetrator (or the perpetrator's descendants, as well). One of the reason seems to be that punishment is essential to one's development. If there are no negative consequences, not only is the likelihood of first time or repeat offense greater, but the seriousness of the commandment is undermined. Throughout its interpretations, the *Mekhilta* makes absolutely clear that the commandment against idolatry is of utmost importance. Similarly, Fretheim argues that this commandment is the very foundation for all other commandments.¹¹²⁸ What is at stake in this commandment is one's loyalty to God.

Indeed, the seriousness of this commandment *can* be communicated effectively through the magnitude of blessing that will be received for observing it. But as the *Mekhilta* points out, blessings alone are not fully sufficient. Negative consequences are also necessary to fully convey this point, and ensure that one observes the commandment. To that end, the zealotry of God may actually be a powerful motivating force, but not in the way a judge would exact restitution from the error of a criminal—but rather, as the *Mekhilta* describes, in the way a parent would seek to successfully raise a child. Seen in this way, punishment does not derive from cold justice, but love. Forgiveness and punishment, then, may not be diametrically opposed, but may actually be most effective when operating in tandem.

¹¹²⁸ Fretheim, 224-225.

6.0 CHAPTER 6: *MEKHILTA D'RABBI ISHMAEL*: THIRD WORD

“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”

-Exod 20:7

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the Third Word of the Decalogue is located in *Bahodesh 7* of Lauterbach's edition.¹¹²⁹ This commentary can be divided into five distinct midrashim, which I have identified as C.1 through C.5 for convenient referencing. The exposition in this chapter addresses all five:

1. Midrash C.1 – which determines whether sacrifices and/or lashes are the necessary punishment for violating the Third Word
2. Midrash C.2 – which argues that one should not swear by God's name altogether
3. Midrash C. 3 – which considers the meaning and significance of Exod 34:7 in its relation to Exod 20:7
4. Midrash C.4 – which outlines the process of atonement for violators of the Third Word
5. Midrash C.5 – which outlines an alternate process of atonement for violators of the Third Word

The procedure I will follow in explicating and comparing the material in this chapter will be the same as chapters 4 and 5, save for one difference. While in the preceding chapters, discussion of each midrash was largely discrete from the others and seemingly discursive, there is a certain unity that can be found in the *Mekhilta*'s commentary of the Third

¹¹²⁹ Lauterbach, 325-328. The Horowitz-Rabin edition gives the Babylonian annual cycle's weekly lectionary divisions priority over the Palestinian "triennial cycle" original to this text and labels this section *Yitro 7* with a secondary identification as *Bahodesh* (227-229).

Word. Throughout the chapter, and especially in the conclusion, I will explicate the unity between the midrashim. Together, the midrashim understand Exod 20:7 singularly as a prohibition on swearing falsely by God's name, which in turn leads the *Mekhilta* into a discussion on the consequences for breaking the commandment. That discussion spans most of the *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the Third Word, and is influenced strongly by the third century world of the *Mekhilta*. This is a world in which the Temple no longer stands. In addition, as a result of instability across the Roman Empire between 235-285 CE, it is a world in which suffering was a common experience. The ways in which the *Mekhilta* deals with the commandment amidst these circumstances affords various opportunities for learning among evangelicals who view Exod 20:7 broadly as a commandment against any misuse of God's name and are experientially distant from the world and concerns of the *Mekhilta*. The *Mekhilta*, as the discussions in this chapter will show, can shed new light on one's conception of God, the Hebrew Bible, atonement in Judaism, and the process of repentance.

6.2 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA C.1

Thou Shalt Not Take the Name of the Lord Thy God in Vain. Swearing falsely¹¹³⁰ was also included in the general statement¹¹³¹ which says: "Or if any one swear clearly with his lips" (Lev. 5.4). Behold, this passage here singles it out from the general statement, making the punishment for it severer but at the same time exempting it from carrying with it the obligation of bringing a sacrifice. One might think¹¹³² that just as it is

¹¹³⁰ The phrase שבוּעָה שוּא can also be translated as "vain oaths."

¹¹³¹ The word כָּלֵל can also be translated "general rule" or "general principle."

¹¹³² Lauterbach has corrected the text with יָכוֹל (I might think), following *Sefer Ot Emet* and corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg's possession. The Horowitz-Rabin edition also adds יָכוֹל. The Oxford manuscript, the Munich manuscript, and the printed editions lack יָכוֹל. *Yalqut Shimoni* has

exempt from the obligation of bringing a sacrifice it is also exempt from the punishment of stripes. But Scripture says: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God,” etc. It has been exempted only from carrying with it the obligation of bringing a sacrifice, but not from carrying with it¹¹³³ the penalty of stripes.

It should be emphasized that the *Mekhilta*, in its treatment of the Third Word, understands swearing falsely by God’s name in its plain sense—a vain oath that invokes God’s name. The issue is not simply that an oath has been broken, but even more that God’s name is involved. What is not in purview, then, is other misuses of God’s name, oaths in general, cursing, etc. The basic meaning of the midrash is relatively straightforward: anyone who violates Exod 20:7—swearing in vain by God’s name—must receive the punishment of lashes. How the midrash arrives at this conclusion is another matter. Three questions arise concerning the midrash’s interpretation: (1) How and why is the midrash relating Exod 20:7 to Lev 5:4? (2) How is the midrash able to assign specific punishments to each instance? (3) What problem with Exod 20:7 is the midrash attempting to solve? I will address the first two questions now and return to the third question in the conclusion.

In regard to the first question: the relationship the midrash draws between Exod 20:7 and Lev 5:4 is based on a rabbinic presumption that the laws of Torah can be grouped under various classifications. A general statement or rule (כלל) can have one or more particular instances (פרט). In our midrash, the general rule is Lev 5:4, while the particular instance is Exod 20:7. The general rule of Lev 5:4 states:

אני אומר (I [might] say/think). The insertion of יכול is probably to conform to a standard rabbinic formula: יכול (I might think)... ת"ל (but Scripture says). See footnote 918.

¹¹³³ Instead of לא יצאת (not from carrying with it), the Munich manuscript has יצאת (from carrying with it). The Munich manuscript has one exempt both from the sacrifice and from lashes. The lack of יכול helps make this position possible, but this position is in tension with the first half of the midrash, which states that the punishment is severer. With the Munich manuscript’s text, the punishment is not clear at all.

Or when a person utters an oath to bad or good purposes—whatever a man may utter in an oath—and, though he has known it, the fact has escaped him, but later realizes his guilt in any of these matters—¹¹³⁴

This general rule encompasses all vain oaths, or oaths one has made that one is unwilling or ultimately unable to fulfill.¹¹³⁵ The Third Word forbids a particular instance of vain oaths: a type of oath in which God's name is invoked. The rabbis' hermeneutical rules teach that the general rule and the particular instance(s) have various kinds of effects on each other. They encoded these rules in a text known as the *Baraita of Thirteen Middot* (מדות in Hebrew, meaning "rules"), a list of rules ascribed to R. Ishmael that assist in the interpretation of Torah. This is found at the beginning of *Sifra*, a tannaitic commentary on Leviticus from the mid-third century CE.¹¹³⁶ In reality, there are sixteen rules and their ascription to R. Ishmael is anything but certain.¹¹³⁷ The *baraita* lists nine *middot* that relate to general and specific rules:

5. A general statement followed by a particular instance
6. A particular instance followed by a general statement
7. A general statement followed by a particular instance and then by a general statement, you must interpret according to the character of the particular instance
8. A general statement that requires a particular instance [to be interpreted]

¹¹³⁴ Translation is NJPS. The NJPS was preferred over the NRSV here, since the latter's translation of שבעה ("vain oath") is misleading. The term more accurately means "oath." This Leviticus text appears at the end of a list of ways in which a person can incur guilt. The other items in the list are withholding information about another's transgression; forgetting one has touched the carcass of an unclean beast, cattle, or creeping thing and thereby become unclean; and forgetting one has touched any human uncleanness and thereby become unclean. The midrash focuses specifically on oaths.

¹¹³⁵ There are other laws in Torah that deal with oaths; however, our midrash does not focus on them.

¹¹³⁶ See Strack and Stemberger, 259-263.

¹¹³⁷ Strack and Stemberger note that the thirteen middot seem to be little more than an expansion of Hillel's seven hermeneutical rules. Moreover, following Gary Porton, Strack and Stemberger, along with Azzan Yadin, argue that the thirteen middot is a composite text derived from multiple sources, and that the midrashic collections in the school of Ishmael use only six of the rules. Yadin goes on to observe that the R. Ishmael midrashic collections (*Mekhilta* and *Sifre Bamidbar*) identify two hermeneutical rules as middot that do not appear in the list of thirteen and use several middot from the thirteen (e.g., *kelal u-ferat*, *gezerah shavah*, and *qal va-homer*), but do not identify them as middot. Yadin also notes that *Sifre Bamidbar* never uses the term "thirteen middot"; the *Mekhilta* does twice, but these are clearly interpolations. All of this evidence makes clear to Yadin that the R. Ishmael midrashic collections are not from the same tradition as the *Baraita of Thirteen Middot*. See Strack and Stemberger, 20-22, and Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 97-121. See also Gary Porton, *The Traditions of Rabbi Ishmael*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 61-65.

9. A particular instance that requires a general statement [to be interpreted]
10. If a matter is included in a general statement and then made an exception to it, this is not to teach regarding this matter alone but regarding the general statement as a whole
11. If a matter is included in a general statement and then made an exception to it in order to teach regarding a similar matter, this is done for the sake of leniency, not strictness
12. If a matter is included in a general statement and then made an exception to it in order to teach regarding a dissimilar matter, this is done for the sake of both leniency and strictness
13. If a matter is included in a general statement and then made an exception to it in order to deal with a new matter, you cannot return to the general statement until Ha-Katuv [i.e., Scripture]¹¹³⁸ does.¹¹³⁹

Similar to number twelve, our midrash identifies a particular instance (Exod 20:7)

included in a general rule (Lev 5:4), in order to determine both leniency and strictness in the punishment. The punishment for the general rule is laid out in Lev 5:5-6:

⁵When you realize your guilt... you shall confess the sin that you have committed.

⁶And you shall bring to the Lord, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

According to this passage, those who make a vain oath must confess their sin, and offer a female sheep or goat as a sin offering, and then the priest will make atonement for them.

In singling out Exod 20:7 from Lev 5:4, our midrash is able to establish a leniency: one need not give a sin offering. But in doing this, the punishment for violating the Third Word is actually made more severe: one is now subject to the punishment of “stripes,” i.e., lashes.

How is it that lashes are now the punishment for swearing vainly in God’s name?

The only text in the Torah that discusses lashes as a form of judicial punishment is

¹¹³⁸ Ha-Katuv will be explained further below.

¹¹³⁹ Translation is from Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 97-98.

Deut 25:1-3.¹¹⁴⁰ This passage states that after declaring a person guilty in a dispute between two individuals, a judge can assign lashes as punishment. While the number of lashes can be “proportionate to the offense,” it cannot exceed forty. The subject of lashes is brought up in several places in tannaitic literature. *Sifre Devarim* 286 understands Deut 25:1-3 to apply to any transgression of a negative commandment, if the damage cannot be repaired by a positive act.¹¹⁴¹ In m. Makkot, a tractate that focuses on the punishment of lashes, one is to receive lashes for a gamut of violations, such as incest, entering the Temple while ritually impure, cutting hair while mourning the dead, and drinking wine as a Nazarite.¹¹⁴² M. *Makkot* 3:4 voices a general rule: a violation of a negative commandment that has within it “arise and do” (i.e., a positive commandment) is exempt from lashes.¹¹⁴³ *Sifre* cites this in its discussions of Deut 25:1-3. In m. Shevuot 3:7, the

¹¹⁴⁰ The word for lash (מכה) also appears in Deut 28:59. Contextually, the meaning of מכה is “plague” or “affliction,” which is also in the semantic range of מכה, i.e., a divine punishment. However, R. Simeon b. Lakish, in the name of R. Joshua, in *Pesiqta Rabbati* 22:6 understands מכה in Deut 28:59 to mean lash.

¹¹⁴¹ *Sifre Devarim* uses Deut 24:4 as the basis of its argument. In this interpretation, the punishment of lashes also applies to the muzzling of an ox; *Sifre* is able to make this interpretive move, due to the proximity of the two laws. The hermeneutical rule operative here appears to be either *semikhut parshiyot* or *ribbui u-miyut*. In the former, an explanation is given for why two verses are in juxtaposition to each other. The latter is attributed to the school of R. Aqiva, to whose school this midrash belongs. In this rule, a general rule (in our case, Deut 24:1-3) is expanded by a particular instance that follows the general rule (in our case, Deut 24:4), such that the general rule now includes everything that falls in the same class as a particular instance. Thus, as the case of the lashes applies to the case of the ox, so too the case of the ox applies to the case of the lashes: the case of the ox expands the case of the lashes to apply to any negative commandment that cannot be reversed by a positive action.

¹¹⁴² *Makkot* 3:10-13 outlines how the lashing should be assigned, following the dictates of Deut 25:1-3. Included in this section is a well-known ruling that the number of lashes should not exceed thirty-nine.

¹¹⁴³ M. *Makkot* 3:4 reads *זה הכלל כל מצות לא תעשה שיש בה קום עשה אין חייבין עליה*. *Makkot* 3:4 draws the general rule from Deut 22:6-7, which also serves as one of its primary examples. This law has both a negative and a positive commandment, according to the Mishnah. The negative commandment is that one is prohibited from taking a mother bird with her children. The positive commandment is that if one *does* take a mother bird with her children, one should let the mother go. The implication is that one should not violate Deut 22:6-7; however, if one does break the negative commandment, one can fulfill the positive commandment and avoid the punishment of lashes. See also b. *Makkot* 14b-16b, which discusses this general rule, and includes Deut 22:6-7 and 25:1-4 in its discussion. The Bavli also includes a discussion of a possible instance in which the offender ruins his opportunity to enact the positive commandment. In such an instance, one is liable to receive the punishment of lashes.

punishment for vain oaths (שבועת שוא) is determined on the basis of intentionality. If one intentionally makes a vain oath, the punishment is lashes (מכות); if one unintentionally commits it, one is exempt (פטור).¹¹⁴⁴ Punishment of lashes in m. Shevuot is consistent with m. Makkot and *Sifre Devarim* —in that commandments against vain oaths are *negative* commandments, and thus deserve lashes.¹¹⁴⁵

All three texts derive from roughly the same period as the *Mekhilta*.¹¹⁴⁶ At the very least, the mishnaic tradition would have been known to the halakhic midrashists of the *Mekhilta*. In light of this, our midrash seems to be saying that even though violators of Exod 20:7 are exempt from the sin offering, they are not exempt from all punishments. Because Exod 20:7 is a negative commandment, it is subject to the same punishment of lashes as other negative commandments. What guides the entire interpretation is Ha-

¹¹⁴⁴ The *Mekhilta* does not describe what constitutes a vain oath. However, the Mishnah does through listing examples, including: swearing something to be true that is known to be untrue (e.g., swearing that a pillar of stone is actually made of gold); witnesses swearing that they will not testify on behalf of someone; swearing to break a commandment; swearing to not eat a loaf of bread. The Mishnah then states that anyone can make a vain oath in any context, including at court or by oneself. In every situation, if one intentionally declares a vain oath, the punishment is lashes. See m. Shevuot 3:8-9, 11. While m. Shevuot and *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 7 do not make a distinction between vain (שוא) and false (שקר) oaths (the word שקר is never used in m. Shevuot), b. Shevuot 20b does. The commandment against vain oaths is found in Exod 20:7, and the commandment against false oaths is in Lev 19:12.

¹¹⁴⁵ The one major exception seems to be Lev 6:2-5, which includes a positive commandment: returning what was taken via a false (שקר) oath, adding one-fifth to it, and making a sacrifice to God. This is not dealt with in tractates *Makkot*, *Shevuot*, or any other tannaitic literature.

Pesiqta Rabbati 22:6 interprets the motive clause of Exod 20:7 to mean that in the case of a person who takes an oath by God's name in public and does not fulfill it, rather than God assigning punishment, it is left to the court to assign lashes as the punishment for the violation. In b. Shevuot 20b-21a, it is obvious to the rabbis that the punishment for both vain and false oaths is lashes. The reason for such a punishment is that both are a violation of a negative commandment, and every violation of a negative commandment that either involves action, or an act of swearing, dealing, or cursing a neighbor by God's name, must receive lashes. R. Papa does raise the issue in Exod 20:7 that God will not hold a person who commits a vain oath in God's name as guiltless; however, Abaye argues that the punishment of lashes does remove the guilt from a person who commits a vain oath in God's name. Abaye does not read Exod 20:7 as "for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name," which is how R. Papa reads the verse. Rather, Abaye reads it as, "for the Lord will not [rule in the matter, but a בית דין (rabbinical court) can with a מטה (rod)] acquit anyone who misuses his name." In other words, God will not hold the person guiltless; this task is left to the rabbinical court, which can render the perpetrator guiltless by assigning a punishment of lashes.

¹¹⁴⁶ The Mishnah received most of its current shape likely by the first two decades of the third century, while the final redaction of *Sifre Devarim* seems to be the late third century. See Strack and Stemberger, 139, 273.

Katuv (literally, “what is written,” i.e., Scripture), a pedagogical personification of Torah mentioned in rule number thirteen, and tasked with helping the reader interpret God’s intent correctly.¹¹⁴⁷ But why, one may be wondering, would Ha-Katuv turn the punishment from the less severe animal sacrifice into the more severe lashes, and then admit that the punishment is now more severe? One possibility is that the destruction of the Temple during the Jewish War of 66-70 CE would require an alternative. That alternative, according to Ha-Katuv, is lashes. In effect, then, Ha-Katuv knows there is no Temple in which a sacrifice can be made for the violation of Exod 20:7, and so it guides the interpreter to find another solution.

6.2.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The most immediate difference between the Christian commentators and the *Mekhilta* is the understanding of what Exod 20:7 encompasses. As noted in chapter three of this dissertation, Augustine typically considers “Lord” in the biblical text as a synonym for Christ. Thus, rather than viewing Exod 20:7 as a commandment about false oaths, Augustine sees it as a prohibition on thinking or speaking about Christ in untruthful ways.¹¹⁴⁸ One need not have complete understanding of Christ. That is impossible. But one must, at the very least, affirm that Christ was “born of God,” the “One from One, only-begotten and co-eternal,” who was truly incarnated, taking the “form of a servant,” “born of the virgin Mary,” suffered on the cross, died, rose again,

¹¹⁴⁷ Here, I follow Yadin’s proposal in seeing Ha-Katuv as one of two personifications of Torah, the other being Torah. The *Mekhilta* employs both, seeing Torah as the authoritative, revelatory voice of Torah itself, and Ha-Katuv as the teacher, who leads the reader to correct interpretations of Torah. See Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 9-33.

¹¹⁴⁸ *s.* 9.13

ascended into heaven, and still bears the scars. To follow the second commandment, then, is to speak the truth about Christ to everyone, to not be silent, especially among those who spread false doctrines.¹¹⁴⁹

Many of the evangelical commentators are similar to Augustine in understanding Exod 20:7 in ways other than false oaths. These commentators take a more expansive approach, often underscoring the broad meaning of אֱלֹהִים, that it does not narrowly mean “false oath,” but is more accurately interpreted as “for a bad purpose,” which encompasses all sorts of uses and circumstances.¹¹⁵⁰ Many of the commentators also point out that in the ANE context, one’s essence or reputation is signified by a person’s name; thus, Exod 20:7 is designed to protect God’s reputation by barring *any* misuse of God’s name.¹¹⁵¹ Stuart, for example, argues that the commandment’s prohibition ranges from “making light of it [God’s name] or overtly mocking it, to speaking about Yahweh in any way disrespectful.”¹¹⁵² Fretheim adds that the commandment encompasses any association between God’s name and “empty phrases or easy religion or the latest ideology of a social or political sort.”¹¹⁵³

Evangelical commentaries also frequently note more limited understandings of Exod 20:7, using a historical, grammatical, or canonical approach to interpret the verse as

¹¹⁴⁹ S. 8.5.

¹¹⁵⁰ E.g., see Stuart, 455-456 and n. 41. Stuart cites Deut 5:11; Jer 2:30; 4:30; 6:29; 18:15; 47:11; Pss 24:4; and 149:20 as supporting his translation.

¹¹⁵¹ Ashby, 90; Bruckner, 184; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 43; Coggins, 79; Currid, 41; Dozeman, 486-488; Fretheim, 227-228; Gilbert and Stallman, 46-47; Harman, 216; W. Janzen, 258; Mackay, 348; Motyer, 224; Page, 85; Ryken, 538-541; Stuart, 455-457; Wiersbe, 110-111.

¹¹⁵² Stuart, 455-456. See also Bailey, 221; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 29, n. 126-127, 43-44; Currid, 41; Enns, 417; Garrett, 470, n. 3; 476-477; Gilbert and Stallman, 46-47; Gowan, 88; Hamilton, 335-336; W. Janzen, 258; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Larsson, 145; Motyer, 218, 224-225; Page, 85; Pokrifka, 222-223; Roper, 327; Ryken, 539-541, 544-546; Scarlata, 162.

¹¹⁵³ Fretheim, 228-229.

a commandment against perjury,¹¹⁵⁴ divination, magic, or any false oath that has invoked God's name.¹¹⁵⁵ Very few of the commentators, however, are satisfied with limiting the commandment in these ways. As noted in chapter two, many of the evangelical commentators prefer an expansive view of the commandment, partly due to denominational influences, partly because the biblical and extrabiblical evidence allow for it, and partly because they believe the nature of the Decalogue as a timeless constitution is to allow for broad applications.

As the evangelical commentators and the *Mekhilta* show, an expansive or more limited understanding of the commandment both have exegetical support. Rather than arguing for the superiority of one position over the other, it may be more worthwhile for evangelicals who take a more expansive view of Exod 20:7 to consider the *Mekhilta*'s approach and see where it will lead. What one will discover, I believe, is that the *Mekhilta*'s singular focus on vain oaths, situated in a post-Temple historical context, necessitates a broader conversation on repentance and atonement that may prove insightful for evangelicals.

To begin this journey, the *Mekhilta* points out in C.1 that false oaths require certain reparations. Similar to the *Mekhilta*, Hamilton underscores a tension between Exod 20:7 and another passage from Leviticus. But while the *Mekhilta* turns to Lev 5:5-6, Hamilton focuses on Lev 6:1-7. Hamilton reveals an apparent contradiction between the two passages: Exod 20:7 does not grant forgiveness for false oaths, but Lev 6:1-7 does.

¹¹⁵⁴ See Stuart, 455, n. 39; Dozeman, 487.

¹¹⁵⁵ See Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44; Dozeman, 487-488; Garrett, 477; Fretheim, 228-229; Gowan, 88; Hamilton, 335; J. Janzen, 148; W. Janzen, 257; Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 32-33; Larsson, 145; Pokrifka, 222; Ryken, 539-540; Scarlata, 162; Wiersbe, 111. In using canonical approaches, e.g., Fretheim cites Lev 19:12; 24:16; Ps 24:4; Matt 5:34-37; Hamilton cites Lev 19:12; Ps 24:4; Dozeman cites Ps 12:3; 31:6.

Hamilton resolves the tension by inferring from Lev 6:1-7 that one will not be forgiven, unless one confesses the sin and seeks restitution. Even though Exod 20:7 does not state this explicitly, it can be assumed.¹¹⁵⁶ The *Mekhilta* takes a much different approach with its texts. Rather than attempting a harmonization between Exod 20:7 and Lev 5:5-6, as Hamilton does with his texts, the *Mekhilta* makes every effort to drive a wedge between them. The reason is that the general rule of Lev 5:4-6 requires a sacrifice if the commandment is broken. Having no recourse to sacrifices in the time of the *Mekhilta*, its goal is to isolate Exod 20:7 from the general rule, in order to apply a different punishment, one that can still be conducted in the *Mekhilta*'s own time. In the process, the *Mekhilta* lays bare the problem of animal sacrifices in the absence of the Temple, which is not discussed in Hamilton's commentary. Hamilton does mention that there is a "ritual expiation" involved in Lev 6:1-7, but his concern is not working out the possibility of atonement in a post-Temple reality. The issue, however, is raised by Ryken, who argues that forgiveness for breaking Exod 20:7 is provided by Christ, who has fulfilled all sacrifices in his atoning death.¹¹⁵⁷ In the logic of the *Mekhilta*, Ryken, in his own way, is applying a leniency to the particular instance of Exod 20:7. From the *Mekhilta*'s perspective, for the process to be complete, there also needs to be a strictness applied, which is not separate from, but very much a part of the atonement. If the reader finds the *Mekhilta*'s application of strictness in the form of lashes as untenable—indeed, even impossible in his/her own time—two other possibilities are offered in C.4 and C.5.

¹¹⁵⁶ Hamilton, 335.

¹¹⁵⁷ Ryken, 539-540, 546-547.

6.3 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* C.2

*Thou Shalt Not Take.*¹¹⁵⁸ Why is this said? Because it says: “And ye shall not swear by My name falsely” (Lev. 19.12), from which I know only that one should not swear. But how would I know that one should not even take it upon himself to swear? Therefore Scripture says: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God.” . . . Before you obligated yourself to take an oath I am a God¹¹⁵⁹ to you. But after you have obligated yourself to take an oath I am a Judge over you. And thus it says: “For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.”¹¹⁶⁰

The midrash opens with a quotation from Exod 20:7, “You shall not take,” and then asks why it was said (למה נאמר). Azzan Yadin notes that this is a standard formula in R. Ishmael’s midrashic collections. It signals an issue in the biblical text that must be addressed. The formula is specifically invoked when two biblical passage are involved in the midrash: the first passage on its own seems unnecessary (hence, “why is this said?”); however, the second passage presents an issue that can only be resolved by the first verse. Thus, the second passage shows the need for the first passage. Together, the biblical verses indicate the proper way to understand the text, free of any problems. Yadin is careful to note that it is Scripture (i.e., Ha-Katuv) that highlights the problem, the connection, and the solution. The reader need only observe Scripture’s process and learn from it. In this way, Scripture is “presponsive”; it anticipates the reader’s inability to understand the biblical text and offers the way forward.¹¹⁶¹

In the case of our midrash, Exod 20:7 seems unnecessary on its own, as Lev 19:12

¹¹⁵⁸ Before לא תשא (you shall not take), the Munich manuscript and the Horowitz Rabin edition add דבר אחר (another interpretation).

¹¹⁵⁹ Instead of לאללה (God), the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have אלהים (God). The use of אלהים is notable, as the standard term is in the plural (אלהים). When אלהים is used, it is typically in reference to gods of other nations.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Yalqut Shimoni* lacks the section from וכן הוא אומר (and thus it says) to שמו לשוא (his name in vain), thereby not turning to a supporting verse, as the other textual witnesses do.

¹¹⁶¹ Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 52-54, 136-137.

already prohibits swearing by God's name falsely: "And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord."¹¹⁶² Thus, Scripture asks, "why is this [Exod 20:7] said?" Scripture's answer is that Lev 19:12 only indicates that one should not swear by God's name falsely.¹¹⁶³ What Lev 19:12 leaves out is וּשְׁלֵא יִקְבֹּל עָלָיו לִישָׁבַע מִנִּי. Lauterbach translates this as, "But how would I know that one should not even take it upon himself to swear?"¹¹⁶⁴ The answer is found in Exod 20:7: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God."

At this point, Lauterbach's translation indicates an ellipsis. The purpose of the ellipsis seems to be to indicate that the midrash is quoting the entire Exod 20:7 verse, but is splitting the verse in half and inserting its comment between the two halves.¹¹⁶⁵ The full verse states, "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." After quoting the first half of Exod 20:7, the midrash focuses on the two names of God used in that half: אֱלֹהִים ("God") and the tetragrammaton ("Lord"), and seeks to determine their significance. Why are there two names for God? Is not one sufficient? The midrash's answer is that each name represents a separate mode of divine interaction. The tetragrammaton represents God as

¹¹⁶² The passage appears among a conglomeration of laws that mostly center around proper relations between neighbors. It follows immediately after a commandment to not "deal falsely" with one's neighbor. In this context, Lev 19:12 can be understood as referring to one's neighbor: one must not swear falsely by God's name to one's neighbor.

¹¹⁶³ The midrash only states שְׁלֵא יִשָּׁבַע (one should not swear). One could take this to mean that the midrash has an even greater restriction in view, that one should not swear at all. This is the direction *Pesiqta Rabbati* 22:6 takes: it understands Lev 19:12 as swearing falsely, and Exod 20:7 as swearing truthfully, and declares that both are a violation. It could also be the case that the *Mekhilta* has employed an economy of words. In this view, the *Mekhilta* indicates that it has in mind swearing falsely by God's name when it cites Lev 19:12: לֹא תִשָּׁבַע בְּשֵׁמִי לְשָׁקֶר (you shall not swear by my name falsely). While acknowledging both positions as possible, I follow the second in my interpretation above.

¹¹⁶⁴ The phrase יִקְבֹּל עָלָיו ("take it upon himself") from the midrash works well with חָשָׂא from Exod 20:7: visually, when one takes it upon oneself to swear, one is lifting (חָשָׂא) God's name to place it upon oneself (יִקְבֹּל עָלָיו).

¹¹⁶⁵ It is also possible that the ellipsis is used to suggest that something is missing. However, there are no textual witnesses to any actual omission from the midrashic text at this point.

Judge, while the name אלהים represents God as non-judge. The midrash is not more specific than this; though, in a roughly contemporaneous and more influential midrash in *Sifre Devarim*, the tetragrammaton represents God's quality of mercy, while אלהים represents God's quality as Judge.¹¹⁶⁶ Notably, in *Sifre*, the role for each name is switched; however, it *may* be possible that the *Mekhilta* also conceives of God's two qualities as justice and mercy. If this is correct, then for the *Mekhilta*, אלהים represents God's mercy and the tetragrammaton represents God's justice. Alternatively, אלהים, in the *Mekhilta*'s understanding, may represent the various roles God assumes when God is not Judge (e.g., provider, comforter, teacher, companion, etc.).

With an answer for why there are two names for God now established, the midrash interprets Exod 20:7 to mean that if a person does not swear by God's name, then God as אלהים will be merciful, or at least act in ways that preclude the role of judge. However, if a person swears by God's name, then God as the tetragrammaton will become the person's judge. The midrash then quotes the second half of Exod 20:7: "for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name." This second half of the verse serves as the midrash's proof: as Scripture clearly states, the tetragrammaton will act as a judge. It also serves as a warning: if one chooses to swear by God's name, then one must be prepared for the reality that God will become one's judge and will enact punishment if one violates the oath.¹¹⁶⁷

¹¹⁶⁶ *Sifre Devarim* 26. The designation of אלהים with God's justice and the tetragrammaton with God's mercy is picked up again in a more famous midrash found in *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:15 and once more in *Bereshit Rabbah* 21:8. See p. 327ff for more.

¹¹⁶⁷ It is curious that the midrash uses אלהים to refer to God before one takes an oath, as the standard term is in the plural (אלהים). See footnote 1159. The midrash may intend that when one does not swear by God's name, God acts in a singular way (אלהים) as non-judge. But, when one swears by God's name, then God acts in an additional way. Another possibility is that before one swears by God's name, God acts like any other god. But, when one swears by God's name, then God expects justices and ensures that it happens.

So, while it may seem that Exod 20:7 is unnecessary, since it appears to repeat the same prohibition as Lev 19:12—swearing falsely by God’s name—in actuality, the function of Exod 20:7 is to indicate why a person should never swear by God’s name at all. The reason, the midrash states, is that if one does, God will become one’s Judge, and should one break one’s oath, punishment will ensue.¹¹⁶⁸

6.3.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The quality of God as judge is emphasized throughout the evangelical commentaries. Stuart, for example, notes that no specific punishment is identified in Exod 20:7, which “indicates the far more general and ominous danger of being held guilty by God, who may choose any way he desires to protect the holiness of his name from misuse.”¹¹⁶⁹ Fretheim states that breaking the commandment, which involves tarnishing or using God’s name in false ways, will disrupt God’s ability to lead people to God; thus, God has established harsh consequences to ensure this does not happen.¹¹⁷⁰ According to Dozeman, if one violates Exod 20:7, God will not let him/her “go free of punishment.”¹¹⁷¹

Underscoring the severe consequences of breaking the commandment, as the evangelical commentators do, is crucial, particularly because God’s own reputation is in

¹¹⁶⁸ *Pesiqta Rabbati* 22:4-6 resolves the apparent redundancy between Exod 20:7 and Lev 19:12 in other ways. The midrashim of *Pesiqta Rabbati* 22:4-6 understand Lev 19:12 to be a commandment against swearing by God’s name falsely, and Exod 20:7 to be a commandment against (1) illegitimately or prematurely taking on God’s or Torah’s authority; (2) acting hypocritically; (3) swearing by something that is *true* (Lev 19:12 is understood as swearing by something that is *false*); and (4) invoking God’s name needlessly.

¹¹⁶⁹ Stuart, 454-455. See also W. Janzen, 258; Mackay, 348; Motyer, 224-225; Ryken, 540-541.

¹¹⁷⁰ Fretheim, 227-228.

¹¹⁷¹ Dozeman, 487-488. See also Pokrifka, 222.

the balance. However, dwelling solely or primarily on God's quality as judge in relation to Exod 20:7 can have unintended consequences. In particular, it can give the impression or reinforce a perception that within the context of the Decalogue, and even more broadly in the context of the Hebrew Bible, God's principal concern and mode of operation is judge and punisher. This is precisely where the *Mekhilta's* commentary can offer a helpful corrective, enlisting Lev 19:12 in its interpretation of Exod 20:7. Similar to the *Mekhilta*, Hamilton also considers the significance of Lev 19:12 in relation to Exod 20:7. Hamilton's goal is to argue how Lev 19:12 helps illuminate the meaning of Exod 20:7 as a commandment against false oaths.¹¹⁷² The *Mekhilta*, as well, considers whether Lev 19:12 and Exod 20:7 are identical commandments, but unlike Hamilton, a redundancy would be an issue for the *Mekhilta*, because of a rabbinic belief that laws are not repeated in Torah. It is this issue that drives the *Mekhilta* to search for new meaning in Exod 20:7. Its solution centers on the two names of God in the verse, seeing in each a distinct attribute of God, as Judge and non-judge. For an evangelical reading Exod 20:7, these two names can remind him/her that God is not simply judge, nor necessarily primarily concerned with judgment. As the midrash states, only when one swears by God's name does God become one's judge.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that the *Mekhilta's* reading of Exod 20:7 as a warning against swearing by God's name has similarities to Jesus's warning in Matt 5:33-37:

³³“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

¹¹⁷² Hamilton, 335.

³⁷Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.

According to Craig Blomberg, Jesus’ teaching is a prohibition on all oaths.¹¹⁷³ If this is true, then Jesus is going one step further than the *Mekhilta* in banning all oaths. This would seem to set up a tension between the *Mekhilta* and Jesus, where the former is merely speaking against oaths that invoke God’s name, while the latter is prohibiting *all* oaths. However, Blomberg also argues that many Jews of Jesus’ day substituted heaven, earth, Jerusalem, heads, etc. for God’s name in hopes of not violating Lev 19:12 and Num 30:2.¹¹⁷⁴ In swearing by parts of the created world, the belief was that one was avoiding swearing by God’s name. According to Blomberg, Jesus points out that all aspects of creation are related to God, and so God’s name is involved no matter what. If this is accurate, then what Jesus seems to actually be doing is working out a certain logic: if one believes God’s name should not be invoked in an oath, then no oath can be made, because in order to make an oath, something must be invoked, but since all things are related to God, nothing can be invoked. While the *Mekhilta* does not make this specific point, in its effort to dissuade its audience from swearing by God’s name, it does not seem unlikely that the *Mekhilta* would at least *consider* Jesus’ logic. Both, at the end of the day, are after the same goal: preventing people from swearing by God’s name. To that end, the *Mekhilta* also adds something to the discussion: it complements Jesus’ teaching exegetically by locating the warning to not swear by God’s name in the biblical text itself.

¹¹⁷³ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 112.

¹¹⁷⁴ Blomberg does not list Exod 20:7; though, there is no reason it need not be included.

6.4 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* C.3

And thus it says: “For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.” R. Eleazar says¹¹⁷⁵: It is impossible to say: “He will not clear,” since it is also said: “And that will clear¹¹⁷⁶ (*ve-naqeh*)” (Ex. 34:7). But it is just as impossible to say: “He will clear,” since it is also said: “He will not clear” (*lo yenaqeh*) (ibid.). You must therefore say: He clears those who repent but does not¹¹⁷⁷ clear those who do not repent.

I have repeated the second half of Exod 20:7 from C.2 here in C.3, since the verse serves as a hinge between the two distinct, yet related midrashim.¹¹⁷⁸ As noted above, the verse was used as C.2’s proof that the tetragrammaton is related to God’s quality of justice. Here, in C.3, it sparks a question about a potential contradiction between it and Exod 34:7. According to Exod 20:7, “the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.” This seems to be the exact opposite of what Exod 34:7 states. To make matters more complicated, Exod 34:7 itself appears to be self-contradictory: it affirms simultaneously that God does and does not acquit a guilty person. The verse Exod 34:7 is part of a

¹¹⁷⁵ Following *Midrash Hakhamim*, Lauterbach has added ר' אלעזר אומר (R. Eleazar says). The other textual witnesses leave the tradent unidentified. However, in a parallel text in t. Kippurim 4:9, the comment is attributed to R. Eleazar. See footnote 1178.

¹¹⁷⁶ Instead of נאמר ונקה (it says, “and he acquits”), the printed editions and Horowitz-Rabin edition have נאמר ינקה (it says, “he will acquit”). The former is the same as the MT, while the latter is not. The latter, however, makes the sentence flow better.

¹¹⁷⁷ Instead of הוא (he), the Oxford manuscript has היא (she). In addition, instead of ואינו (does not [with a male direct object]), the Oxford manuscript has ואינה (does not [with a female direct object]). This would be an intriguing disruption of expected gender, but it is likely an error.

¹¹⁷⁸ One wonders whether C.3 may have been an independent midrash centered only on Exod 34:7, which was then inserted into the *Mekhilta* to resolve a possible contradiction between it and Exod 20:7. In t. Kippurim 4:9, R. Eleazar’s midrash appears again in a shorter form. He cites Exod 34:7 and then states that God forgives those who repent, but does not forgive those who do not. Without other contemporaneous parallels, it is difficult to determine the exact development. However, R. Eleazar’s comment in t. Kippurim does seem more naturally placed. It appears toward the end of a discussion on the Day of Atonement, repentance, and forgiveness. Immediately before R. Eleazar’s interpretation, there is a comment that the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness *only* if a person repents. R. Eleazar’s comment then provides exegetical proof of this.

speech made by God during the renewal of the covenant following the Golden Calf episode,¹¹⁷⁹ and is best read together with Exod 34:6:

⁶The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing (וְיִנְקֶה לֹא יִנְקֶה) the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.

R. Eleazar focuses on two particular oddities in Exod 34:7. The first is the double appearance of נִקֶּה (to acquit). In Exod 34:7, the first appearance of נִקֶּה is a Piel infinitive absolute with a conjunction (וְיִנְקֶה). The second is a third person Piel imperfect (יִנְקֶה). They are separated by the negative לֹא. A modern reader understands the infinitive absolute as adding emphasis to the imperfect. Thus, the NRSV reads, “yet by no means (וְיִנְקֶה לֹא) clearing (יִנְקֶה)” and it adds an implied object, “the guilty.”

Typical of rabbinic hermeneutics, R. Eleazar reads each appearance of נִקֶּה as conveying its own unique meaning. Thus, R. Eleazar reads וְיִנְקֶה as “he clears” and לֹא יִנְקֶה as “he will not clear.” This resolves the first oddity, but in the process, creates the second. If one follows R. Eleazar's solution, the verse becomes self-contradictory: God simultaneously clears, but also does not clear. This he solves by assigning each נִקֶּה to a different circumstance. The first refers to the one who repents—God clears (or acquits) this person. The second refers to a person who does not repent—God does not clear this person. With this interpretive move, he renders Exod 34:6-7 in the following way:

⁶The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and he clears [the guilty who repent]; he will not clear [the guilty who do not repent], visiting the iniquity

¹¹⁷⁹ See Exodus 32-33.

of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation.¹¹⁸⁰

R. Eleazar's resolution of the apparent self-contradiction in Exod 34:7 between "he clears" and "he will not clear" also brings into explanatory relief the apparent contradiction between "he clears [the guilty who repent]" in Exod 34:7 and "yet by no means clearing the guilty" in Exod 20:7. There *is* no contradiction. As Exod 34:7 states, God only clears those who repent. Thus, the proper way to understand Exod 20:7 is that "The Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name [*if that person does not repent*]."

R. Eleazar does not specify here what repentance entails. The *Mekhilta*, however, provides two answers in C.4 and C.5 below.¹¹⁸¹

6.4.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Discussion of any possibility of forgiveness in conjunction with Exod 20:7 is rare among the Christian commentators. Most of the time, Augustine merely lists Exod 20:7 and provides no commentary.¹¹⁸² The few times that he does discuss the text, he makes no mention of forgiveness. Among the evangelical commentators, only two refer to

¹¹⁸⁰ Whether intentional or not, R. Eleazar's reading of the text also allows for the possibility in Exod 34:7 that only those who do not repent will have their sin visited on their descendants up to the fourth generation.

In later rabbinic tradition, ונקה (and he clears) is understood as the last of the שלש עשרה מדות (Thirteen Attributes of God's Mercy). The phrase appears first in b. Rosh Hashanah 17b. Here, Rav Judah states that if Israel recites the Thirteen Attributes, God will grant forgiveness of sins. In broader Jewish tradition, the Thirteen Attributes becomes a central component of Selihot, a series of penitential prayers recited during Yom Kippur and the season leading up to it, as well as on other fast days. In our midrash, R. Eleazar merely interprets ונקה as one of God's qualities.

¹¹⁸¹ While it seems to be the case that the *Mekhilta* intends R. Eleazar's midrash as a tempering of the second half of Exod 20:7, this is not the direction that b. Shevuot 39a takes, which states that R. Eleazar's ruling applies to all sins, except the violation of Exod 20:7. Only Exod 20:7 states specifically that God will not clear the one who violates it. Thus, according to Shevuot, this sin is in a class of its own, and no repentance can clear it. See also footnote 1145 for a different solution to the second half of Exod 20:7 in the Bavli. The Bavli reflects a strict stance the Babylonian rabbis took toward oaths.

¹¹⁸² *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19; *s.* 248.4, 179A.3, and 250.3; and *c. ep. pel.* 3.10.

forgiveness. As mentioned above, Ryken argues that Christ's atoning sacrifice brings forgiveness for breaking the commandment.¹¹⁸³ Hamilton turns to the possible contradiction between Lev 6:1-7, which states that one can be forgiven for uttering a false oath, and Exod 20:7, which states that one cannot. He resolves this by inferring from Lev 6:1-7 that, like our midrash, one who does not repent will not receive forgiveness. To Hamilton, Exod 20:7 does not make this point due to its effort toward "brevity."¹¹⁸⁴ The fact that the vast majority of Christian commentators do not discuss the possibility of forgiveness in relation to Exod 20:7 is not surprising. After all, the text itself does not mention the possibility. In addition, an emphasis on the expansive nature of the prohibition in Exod 20:7 tends to steer the focus away from false oaths and the various biblical texts that discuss them, particularly those that delineate the process of atonement for violators. Furthermore, the belief that Christ atones for all sins would preclude a need to consider the possibility that violating Exod 20:7 might be unforgivable, even if the wording of the commandment might give that impression.

The insight derived by the *Mekhilta* has strong resonance with Hamilton's argument. At first glance, the greatest difference is the exegetical strategy. While Hamilton investigates Lev 6:1-7 in relation to Exod 20:7, the *Mekhilta* turns to Exod 34:6-7. Hamilton's conclusion is based on a speculation about the text. He writes, "So which is it? Can ritual expiation be offered (Lev 6:1-7 [5:20-26]) for making an intentional false oath, or withheld (Exod 20:7)? Perhaps forgiveness is granted if the individual on his own comes forward, confesses his sin, and makes restitution to the

¹¹⁸³ Ryken, 539-540, 546-547.

¹¹⁸⁴ Hamilton, 335.

aggrieved party.”¹¹⁸⁵ The *Mekhilta* has no need for speculation, and instead provides concrete exegesis, grounding the consequences of repentance, or the lack thereof, in the biblical text itself. In the process, the *Mekhilta* engages Exod 34:6-7, immersing its discussion of Exod 20:7 and repentance in descriptions of God’s mercy, patience, love, faithfulness, and justice. The result is that the motive clause of Exod 20:7 is not seen as a grave warning about the severe and irreversible consequences of breaking the commandment, but is rendered as a text in which judgment will occur, but forgiveness from a gracious, loving, and faithful God is possible—so long as an individual is willing to repent. With this connection established, Exod 20:7 is made part of a profound statement about the possibility of forgiveness.

6.5 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* C.4

4. For four things did R. Matia b. Heresh go to R.¹¹⁸⁶ Eleazar ha-Qappar¹¹⁸⁷ to Laodicea.¹¹⁸⁸ He said to him: Master! Have you heard the four distinctions in atonement which R. Ishmael used to explain? He said to him: Yes.¹¹⁸⁹ One scriptural passage¹¹⁹⁰ says: “Return, O backsliding children” (Jer. 3.14), from which we learn that repentance brings forgiveness. And another scriptural passage says: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you” (Lev. 16.30), from which we learn that the

¹¹⁸⁵ Hamilton, 335.

¹¹⁸⁶ The printed editions lack רבי (R.).

¹¹⁸⁷ the Oxford and Munich manuscripts lack אצל רבי אלעזר הקפר (to R. Eleazar Ha-Qappar). *Midrash Hakhhamim* has אצל ר' אלעזר (go to R. Eleazar).

¹¹⁸⁸ Instead of ללודיקא (to Laodicea), the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have ללודיא (perhaps a variant spelling of לודיקא, or an Aramaic transliteration of Lydda, the Hebrew being לודאה). *Midrash Hakhhamim* has ללודיקא (perhaps a variant of לודיקא). Both לודיקא and לודיקא are variants of Laodicea. The corrections of the Venice edition in Louis Ginzberg’s possession has לרומי (to Rome). Rome is also attested in the parallel in b. Yoma 86a. In every variation, the point is that he traveled outside the Land.

¹¹⁸⁹ The word “yes” does not appear in the Hebrew text, making the encounter a little more ambiguous. It could be R. Matia b. Heresh explaining the four distinctions to R. Eleazar Ha-Qappar, or R. Eleazar Ha-Qappar explaining the four distinctions, thereby showing that he knows them.

¹¹⁹⁰ Note that it is not הכתוב (Ha-Katuv, the personification of Scripture), but כתוב (passage).

Day of Atonement brings forgiveness. Still another scriptural passage says: “Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you till ye die” (Isa. 22.14), from which we learn that death brings forgiveness. And still another scriptural passage says: “Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with strokes” (Ps. 89.33), from which we learn that chastisements¹¹⁹¹ bring forgiveness. How are all these four passages to be maintained¹¹⁹²? If one has transgressed a positive commandment and repents of it, he is forgiven on the spot.¹¹⁹³ Concerning this it is said: “Return, O backsliding children.” If one has violated a negative commandment and repents, repentance alone has not the power of atonement. It merely leaves the matter pending¹¹⁹⁴ and the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness. Concerning this it is said: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you.” If one willfully commits transgressions punishable by extinction¹¹⁹⁵ or by death at the hands of the court and repents, repentance cannot leave the matter pending nor can the Day of Atonement bring forgiveness. But both repentance and the Day of Atonement together bring him half a pardon. And chastisements secure him half a pardon.¹¹⁹⁶ Concerning this it is said: “Then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with strokes.” However, if one has profaned the name of God and repents, his repentance cannot make the case pending, neither can the Day of Atonement bring him forgiveness, nor can sufferings cleanse him of his guilt.¹¹⁹⁷ But repentance and the Day of Atonement both can merely make the matter pend. And the day of death with the suffering preceding it completes the atonement. To this applies: “Surely this iniquity shall not be expiated by you till ye die.” And so also when it says: “That the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated with sacrifice nor offering” (I Sam. 3.14) it means: With sacrifice and offering it cannot be expiated, but it will be expiated by the day of death. Rabbi says: I might have thought that the day of death does not

¹¹⁹¹ The word for “chastisements” is ייסורין, which can also be translated as “chastisements that cause suffering.”

¹¹⁹² The word for “maintained” is יתקיימו, a Hitpa'el imperfect of קום, which can also be translated “harmonized.”

¹¹⁹³ Instead of משם (literally, from there; Lauterbach has “on the spot”), *Midrash Hakhamim* has ממקומו (from his place), thereby smoothing the text out more.

¹¹⁹⁴ The word for “pending” is תולה, a Qal participle of תלה, which literally means “hang” or “suspend,” and gives a visual sense that the punishment is suspended (over a person) until the Day of Atonement.

¹¹⁹⁵ The word for “extinction” is כרת, which is better translated as “death by divine hands.” This is contrasted with “death at the hands of the court,” which is exacted by humans.

¹¹⁹⁶ Instead of וייסורין מכפרין (and corrections by suffering atone), the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have וייסורין ממרקיין ומכפרין (and corrections by suffering remove sin and atone). These editions specify that not only is atonement obtained, but sin is also removed by corrections by suffering. The language also parallels Lev 16:30: “for on this day, atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you” (כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם).

¹¹⁹⁷ Instead of ולא בייסורין למרק (nor can corrections by suffering remove sin), the printed editions and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have ולא ייסורין בלבד ממרקיין (nor can corrections by suffering alone remove sin). Here, these editions specify that corrections by suffering cannot remove sin by themselves. They require something more.

bring forgiveness. But when it says: “When I have opened your graves,” etc. (Ezek. 37.13), behold we learn that the day of death does bring atonement.

This midrash outlines four חלוקי כפרה (divisions of atonement) that R. Ishmael used to teach. According to R. Ishmael, four scriptural passages indicate various actions that will atone for different kinds of sin. Although these four verses may seem contradictory, they may be harmonized in the following way:

	Sin	Act	Outcome	Verse
Division 1	Breaking positive commandment	Repentance	Forgiven immediately	Jer 3:14 ¹¹⁹⁸
Division 2	Breaking negative commandment	Repentance	Suspends matter	Lev 16:30 ¹¹⁹⁹
		Day of Atonement	Atonement	
Division 3	Action willfully done, deserving extinction or death penalty	Repentance & Day of Atonement	Half atonement	Ps 89:33 ¹²⁰⁰
		Corrections by suffering	Half atonement	
Division 4	Profaning God’s name	Repentance & Day of Atonement	Suspends matter	

¹¹⁹⁸ This oracle, given during the reign of Josiah (641-610 BCE), compares Judah and Israel to two unfaithful sisters married to a husband (God). Both Judah and Israel play the role of a whore in their idolatry (Jer 3:6, 9). Even after God sends Israel away with a decree of divorce, Judah remains steeped in her idolatry and refusal to fully return to God. Thus, God turns to Israel and calls to her to return to God: “Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord; I will not be angry forever... Return, O faithless children, says the Lord, for I am your master” (vv. 12-14). Two things draw R. Ishmael’s attention to this verse: the statement that God will not be angry forever, and the language of שׁוּב (return), which appears in v. 12 and 14. This allows a rabbinic reader to take this verse out of context and interpret שׁוּב to mean a specific action: תשובה (repentance).

¹¹⁹⁹ This passage comes from one of three descriptions of the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; 23:26-32; and Num 29:7-11). Leviticus 16 details a complicated ritual in which the sins of Israel will be forgiven; this ritual should take place every seventh month, on the tenth day. Our passage in the midrash states that the Day of Atonement will bring atonement for Israel, rendering her clean before God. The passage is worded in such a way that one could understand the priest or the day itself to effect atonement. This will be discussed more below.

¹²⁰⁰ The subject of Psalm 89 is often understood to be 2 Sam 7, in which God establishes the so-called davidic covenant with David (i.e., the eternal endurance of the davidic line on the throne). After affirming the davidic covenant, the psalm turns to Israel. Speaking in God’s voice, the psalm states that if Israel forsakes God’s law (which a rabbinic reader would understand as Torah), God will punish it with the rod and scourges. This is in order to correct Israel. The psalm makes clear that God will never forsake God’s children (v. 33[34]). Interestingly, the psalm then discusses the destruction of the kingdom, and pleads for God to remember Israel and restore it (vv. 38-52). This could be an exilic amendment to the psalm. A rabbinic reader would likely see in this section an allusion to the destruction of the Second Temple. The destruction, then, could be understood as corporate “corrections by suffering,” though the midrash focuses on an individual’s life and actions.

		corrections by suffering & death	Atonement	Isa 22:14 ¹²⁰¹
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The obvious reason this midrash appears in the *Mekhilta* is because of its discussion of Division four, profanation of God's name. Violation of the Third Word, according to this midrash, is a form of profaning God's name. However, C.3, C.4, and C.5 all appear together in the Tosefta,¹²⁰² which suggests that these three midrashim were transmitted as a unit. As noted in the commentary above of C.3, Exod 20:7 is linked to Exod 34:7 by the phrase *לֹא יִקְרָא שְׁמִי בַּעֲוֹן*. In turn, C.3 is linked to C.4 and C.5 by the issue of repentance and profaning God's name.

The severity of profaning God's name is indicated by its placement in R. Ishmael's list as the last of the four, the number and types of acts required to atone for the error (repentance, Day of Atonement, corrections by suffering, and death), and the introduction of death as a means of atonement. Whereas the other three divisions obtain atonement through repentance or some combination of this with the Day of Atonement and corrections by suffering, division four only suspends the matter with repentance and the Day of Atonement, and withholds atonement until one undergoes corrections by suffering *and* death.¹²⁰³

¹²⁰¹ Isaiah 22 is an oracle against Judah, the content of which is extremely vague. There seems to have been a battle and a defeat (vv. 2-11), and possibly a reference to the fall of Jerusalem (vv. 8-11). Whatever tragedy has struck, God calls for mourning as the proper response, and yet the people rejoice (vv. 12-14). For this, God will not forgive the people until the day they die (v. 14). A possible resonance with the destruction of Jerusalem works well for our midrash, which was composed after the fall of the Second Temple. However, what interests R. Ishmael most is v. 14: a declaration by God that iniquity will not be forgiven until one dies.

¹²⁰² T. Kippurim 4:5-9.

¹²⁰³ For a tannaitic parallel to R. Ishmael's four divisions, see t. Kippurim 4:6-8. Amoraic parallels from the Land of Israel appear in y. Sanhedrin 10:1 [27c]; y. Yoma 8:8 [45b]; and y. Shavuot 1:9 [33b]. There are tannaitic views that differ from R. Ishmael's. For example, in m. Yoma 8:8, repentance atones for breaking minor positive or negative commandments. Meanwhile if one breaks a major positive or negative commandment, repentance suspends punishment, and the Day of Atonement brings forgiveness. See also the end of t. Kippurim 4:5, prefaced to R. Ishmael's four divisions, which comments on m. Yoma 8:8. Here, the Tosefta clarifies that a minor sin does not include taking God's name in vain. Major sins

What exactly R. Ishmael has in mind when he speaks of repentance, the Day of Atonement, corrections by suffering, and death is not evident from the midrash itself. The rabbinic word for repentance is תשובה (from the root שׁוּב, “to return”). The *Mekhilta* mentions repentance in six separate places,¹²⁰⁴ but none of these instances describe what exactly it constitutes. Repentance is also referenced dozens of times throughout other tannaitic literature. Of these, there are five specific texts that provide indications of what repentance entailed. These descriptions should not necessarily be thought of as a cohesive whole, providing a standard view of repentance in rabbinic thought. They are embedded in different sources, which in turn draw on the positions of various rabbis from various contexts.¹²⁰⁵ That said, according to these sources, repentance required a confession of sin with a humble heart¹²⁰⁶; it also included fasting¹²⁰⁷; if an act was committed against another person, repentance required repair of the damage caused¹²⁰⁸; for forgiveness to be granted, when one repented, one had to commit to not performing the same sin again¹²⁰⁹; finally, it was never considered too late to repent, even at the end of one’s life.¹²¹⁰

The Day of Atonement is mentioned in five separate places in the *Mekhilta*.¹²¹¹

encompass sins that require the death penalty (by a human court) and taking God’s name in vain. According to R. Judah, that means taking God’s name in vain requires both repentance and the Day of Atonement, in order to receive forgiveness.

¹²⁰⁴ *Pisha* 1, 14; *Shirta* 4, 5; *Bahodesh* 1, 7.

¹²⁰⁵ The first efforts of systematizing rabbinic tradition occurred in the medieval period, beginning first with Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah* (assembled between 1170-1180 CE). Maimonides devotes an entire book to the subject of repentance in the first division of the *Mishneh Torah*. For a contemporary description of repentance in Judaism, which draws on many of the aforementioned sources, see Jacob Neusner, “Repentance in Judaism,” in *Rituals and Ethics: Patterns of Repentance in Judaism, Christianity, Islam*, eds. Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 19-28.

¹²⁰⁶ *Sifra Beḥuqotai* 2:8:3. The *Sifra*’s comment is from a midrash on Lev 26:40.

¹²⁰⁷ *Sifre Devarim* 31. The midrash describes Reuben’s repentance after having intercourse with Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah (see Gen 35:22).

¹²⁰⁸ M. Yoma 8:9; t. Bava Qamma 10:39.

¹²⁰⁹ M. Yoma 8:9.

¹²¹⁰ T. Qiddushin 1:16. For biblical evidence, it cites Ezek 33:12.

¹²¹¹ *Vayassa* 5, 6; *Amaleq* 4; *Bahodesh* 7; *Shabbata* 2. In *Vayassa* 5-6, one midrash states that manna did not fall on the Day of Atonement while the Israelites were in the desert, because the Day of Atonement is treated like a Sabbath. In *Amaleq* 4, Moses judges the people in Exod

None of these references address two of the biggest questions for us: in the absence of the Temple, can one still obtain atonement, and how is the Yom Kippur to be observed? Rabbinic texts from the *Mekhilta*'s era (i.e., tannaitic literature) offer some answers. At the end of m. Yoma (8:9),¹²¹² R. Aqiva states that God alone makes a person clean. It is not the rituals themselves that do.¹²¹³ Günter Stemberger suggests that this saying of R. Aqiva was added at the end of the tractate precisely to reassure a people in whose time the Temple no longer stood and for whom the biblical sacrificial atonement rituals were therefore unavailable.¹²¹⁴ M. Yoma 8:9 also teaches, however, that the Day of Atonement can atone for sins against God, but cannot atone for sins against one's neighbor until one has repaired whatever damage one has caused. *Sifra* offers more nuance on the matter. Leviticus 16:30 states כִּי-בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר עֲלֵיכֶם ("for on this day atonement shall be made for you"). As it stands, the phrase is rather ambiguous, as there is no subject specified for יִכָּפֵר (the one actualizing the atonement) in the biblical text. This leaves room for *Sifra* in

18:13 on the Day of Atonement.

¹²¹² Günter Stemberger analyzes Mishnah Yoma and describes three modern theories about what motivates the choices made in how to describe the Day of Atonement: (1) to preserve the memory of the cult, so that when the Temple is rebuilt, there would be a manual to refer to; (2) to redescribe the Second Temple cult in more ideal, biblical terms; (3) to create a pure description of the cult in biblical terms without any reference to Second Temple practices. Stemberger adopts a combination of the first and second positions, arguing that Mishnah Yoma seems to be a composite of exegesis of the biblical texts and memory of the Second Temple ritual. See Günter Stemberger, "Yom Kippur in Mishnah Yoma," in *The Day of Atonement: its Interpretations in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions*, eds. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 121, 135-137.

See also Naftali Cohn, *The Memory of the Temple and the Making of the Rabbis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). According to Cohn, the rabbis concentrated heavily on the Temple and the rituals surrounding it in the Mishnah, in order to convince other Jews that they were the authorities over the tradition, especially the rituals, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple. Cohn adopts the position that the rabbis who wrote the Mishnah were not particularly influential, and focused especially on the Temple, because it remained of special importance to other Jews. Their descriptions of the Temple and narratives about its rituals were carefully crafted to promote their role and authority as legal scholars.

¹²¹³ The text reads רַבִּי אֶקִּיבָא אֲשֶׁרֵיכֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מִי אַתֶּם מִיִּטְהַרִּין מִי מִטְהַר אַתְּכֶם אֲבִיכֶם שְׁבַשְׁמִים. See also t. Kippurim 4:16, which argues similarly that the Day itself atones, rather than the goat that is sacrificed.

¹²¹⁴ Stemberger, "Yom Kippur," 135. See also t. Kippurim 4:16, which expresses a similar position.

Aḥare Mot 5:8:1 to identify two subjects: the animal offerings¹²¹⁵ and the Day of Atonement itself.¹²¹⁶ Both of these bring atonement. *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 5:8:1 then goes on to argue that the Day alone effects atonement, whether or not animal sacrifices are made. Here, Lev 16:30 is read as “for *by means of* this Day, atonement shall be made for you.”¹²¹⁷ However, similar to m. Yoma 8:9, *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 5:8:1 is careful to indicate that the Day of Atonement atones for sins against God, but can only atone for sins against neighbors after the wrongdoing has been rectified.¹²¹⁸ The mishnaic tradition would have been known to the halakhic midrashists of the *Mekhilta* and *Sifra*. These midrashists’ concern was especially to tie the halakhic tradition to its biblical basis. In light of this, the *Mekhilta* and *Sifra* offer the same clarification of the tradition, but ground it in biblical texts: indeed God forgives sins, but that it is done through the Day of Atonement in combination with repentance, whether or not the Temple still stands. The *Mekhilta*, then, goes on to offer an even further clarification: that depending on the severity of the sin, the Day of Atonement will atone for all or part of the sin, or else suspend the matter until death brings atonement.¹²¹⁹

We turn now to the question of how Yom Kippur was observed after the destruction of the Temple. According to Lev 16:31, the Day of Atonement “is a sabbath

¹²¹⁵ These are the bull, ram, two male goats, and ram (Lev 16:3-9).

¹²¹⁶ See also *Sifra Emor* 11:14:1 for a similar midrash. Here, the Day brings atonement, regardless of whether a holy convocation is had, Israel rests, or the offerings are made. The one requirement is an act of repentance. Only those who repent will be atoned.

¹²¹⁷ Translation mine. The ׀ is taken to have a causal function.

¹²¹⁸ See t. Kippurim 4:5, 9 for similar commentary. See also t. Kippurim 4:16-17. One of the differences between the goat sacrifice and the Day of Atonement, according to the Tosefta, is that the former brings atonement right away, while the latter can only come when the Day arrives.

¹²¹⁹ See t. Kippurim 4:6-9 for a parallel text. The Tosefta has gathered the varying traditions found in the Mishnah, *Sifra*, and *Mekhilta*.

of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves; it is a statute forever.”¹²²⁰ The implementation of this command is laid out in m. Yoma 8: One should not eat, drink, wash, anoint, wear leather shoes, or have sexual relations (8:1-2)¹²²¹; one is to refrain from work (8:3)¹²²²; children, hungry pregnant women, and the sick are exempt from fasting (8:4-5)¹²²³; and one is permitted to save a life (8:6-7).¹²²⁴ Apparently, after the destruction of the Temple, it became a practice to stay up the night of Yom Kippur (in other words, the entire Day of Atonement), similar to the high priest when the Temple stood. However, the Tosefta states that it is a sin to do so.¹²²⁵ According to t. Kippurim 4:14, one must make a confession of sins seven times: (1) before the meal that precedes

¹²²⁰ For a comprehensive analysis of tannaitic and amoraic sources on Yom Kippur, see Joseph Tabory, “The Early History of the Liturgy of Yom Kippur,” in *The Experience of Jewish Liturgy: Studies Dedicated to Menahem Schmelzer*, ed. Debra Reed Blank (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 285-308. However, it should be noted that Tabory tends to be less critical in his dating of sources. See also Michael D. Swartz, “Liturgy, Poetry, and the Persistence of Sacrifice,” in *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism Before and After the Destruction of the Second Temple*, eds. Daniel R. Schwartz, Zeev Weiss, and Ruth A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 393-412; and Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, eds. and trans., *Avodah: An Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 4-20. Swartz and Yahalom speculate that m. Yoma or a version of it was recited in the synagogues during Yom Kippur not long after its composition. However, the earliest evidence of this is b. Yoma 36b and 56b.

¹²²¹ These are usually seen as the implementation of the fivefold biblical references to “denying oneself,” otherwise translated as “afflicting one’s soul.” According to Reuven Hammer, the rabbis sought to take specific mourning practices and apply them to the Day of Atonement, so that the Day would be understood as a time of mourning. See Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days: A Guide to the Origins, Themes, and Prayers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 18.

¹²²² A specific statement that the Day of Atonement is to be treated like the Sabbath is found in m. Megillah 1:5 and m. Moed Qatan 3:6. The biblical basis for treating the Day of Atonement like the Sabbath is established with the שבת שבתון, found in such passages as Lev 16:31 (“it is a sabbath of complete rest”; underline mine).

¹²²³ See t. Taanit 2:14, which states that pregnant or nursing women must fast on the Day of Atonement.

¹²²⁴ See t. Kippurim 4:1-5; and the entire chapters of *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 5:7; *Sifra Emor* 11:14 for parallel texts and further commentary. See also t. Shabbat 12:17. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Mishnah and Tosefta texts do not state specifically that the practices they outline on fasting and resting on Yom Kippur apply even after the destruction of the Temple. It is reasonable to assume the practices would continue, especially considering the line “it is a statute forever” in Lev 16:31. In addition, *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 5:8:1-3 and *Emor* 11:14:1-5 give a strong indication the practices should continue when they juxtapose a conversation about the continued redemptive significance of the Day of Atonement with fasting and resting. *Sifra Emor* 11:14:3-4, 7-9 goes a step further in outlining the severe consequences for breaking the commanded rest and fast on the Day of Atonement.

¹²²⁵ T. Kippurim 1:9.

the Day of Atonement, (2) after the meal that precedes the Day of Atonement, (3) the evening prayer, (4) the morning prayer, (5) *musaf*,¹²²⁶ (6) the afternoon prayer, and (7) the closing prayer unique to this Day, known as *ne'ilah*. Individuals confess after their personal recitation of the Amidah,¹²²⁷ and the prayer leader includes the confessional prayers during the fourth blessing of his repetition of the Amidah.¹²²⁸ There is a debate whether one must list each individual sin one committed during the confession; any sins confessed during the last Yom Kippur, though, need not be named, unless the sin was committed again. Torah readings were also part of the Day of Atonement. The text that was read was Leviticus 16, divided among six readers.¹²²⁹ In addition, the shofar (ram's horn) was blown.¹²³⁰ At the close of Yom Kippur, Havdalah was recited to mark the end of the Day.¹²³¹ Together, these tannaitic descriptions of the Day of Atonement constitute standard rabbinic practices, and likely were what R. Ishmael had in mind when thinking of Yom Kippur; how broadly these practices were followed beyond rabbinic circles is another question.¹²³²

¹²²⁶ *Musaf* was added on days in which an additional sacrifice would be offered at the Temple.

¹²²⁷ The Amidah is a prayer composed of a series of paragraph-length blessings, recited at every service. The prayer leader repeats the Amidah if a quorum of ten is present, except at the evening service. On Yom Kippur, the prayer consists of seven benedictions; in the weekday services immediately preceding and following it, it had eighteen benedictions in tannaitic times. One more was added in subsequent centuries.

¹²²⁸ Whether the individual recites the Amidah before the prayer leader does a second time, or both recite it simultaneously, is not explicitly stated in the Tosefta. There appears to have been a debate about this structure, which has been preserved in t. Rosh Hashanah 2:18. From this debate, it is clear both were happening.

¹²²⁹ See m. Megillah 3:4-5, 4:2; t. Megillah 3:7, 3:11. According to R. Aqiva, there were seven readers. The point at which Leviticus 16 was read is not specifically stated; based on the reading schedule for the Sabbath, it would have been read in the morning. In later custom, Leviticus 18 is read in the afternoon.

¹²³⁰ *Sifra Behar* 2:1:3. See also *Sifra Emor* 11:13:6 and *Sifra Behar* 2:2:1.

¹²³¹ T. Berakhot 5:30. The text also discusses the proper order of the components of Havdalah: blessings over the wine, spices, and the Havdalah blessing itself.

¹²³² Today, the Day of Atonement is understood in Judaism as the end of a ten-day liturgical sequence known as the "Ten Days of Penitence," the "Days of Awe," or the High Holy Days. The sequence begins with Rosh Hashanah, the new year. According to Reuven Hammer, t. Rosh Hashanah 1:13 gives the first textual witness to the link between the two days. See Hammer, *High Holy Days*, 17-18. For more on

Confession of sins is not sufficient for all atonement. David Kraemer observes that our midrash understands suffering to be integral to the process. Kraemer argues that our midrash sees suffering as a replacement for animal sacrifices in the absence of the Temple.¹²³³ This point is made more explicit, Kraemer states, in *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 10:

R. Nehemiah says: precious are chastisements. For just as sacrifices are the means of atonement, so also are chastisements. What does it say about sacrifices? “And it shall be accepted for him to make atonement” (Lev 1:4). And what does it say in connection with chastisements? “And they shall be paid the punishment of their iniquity” (ibid., 26:43). And not only this, but chastisements atone even more than sacrifices. For sacrifices affect only one’s money, while chastisements affect the body. And thus it says: “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4).¹²³⁴

According to R. Nehemiah, Kraemer notes, though animal sacrifices are effective and “desirable,” suffering is an equally effective way of obtaining atonement. Indeed, “suffering is even more effective than sacrifices, because suffering involves personal, bodily sacrifice, whereas animal sacrifices do not.”¹²³⁵ In the first few centuries of the common era, several events caused high degrees of suffering for Jews living in Palestine, most notably the destruction of the Second Temple, the failed Bar Kokhbab revolt, and its aftermath, a period known as “the time of danger.” As noted in chapter 5,¹²³⁶ persecutions of Jews following the Bar Kokhbab revolt appear to have ended quickly under Antoninus, which allowed the Jewish tradition to revitalize. However, there were other factors that caused suffering, namely a period of severe instability in the Roman Empire between

the history and development of the two rituals, see the rest of Hammer’s book, which provides a good introduction to the High Holy Days. For an annotated bibliography of research on the various ritual components of the Day of Atonement, including their history and development, see Ruth Langer, *Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Research* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 156-165.

¹²³³ David Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 68-69, 81.

¹²³⁴ Translation is Lauterbach’s. See Lauterbach, 346.

¹²³⁵ Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 85.

¹²³⁶ See pp. 346ff.

235-285 CE. This instability, sparked by battling Roman armies attempting to place their own emperor on the throne led to political tumult, which in turn caused higher taxation, increased inflation, food shortages, migrations, unstable trade, and declining birthrates felt across the entire empire, including Palestine.¹²³⁷ According to the tannaitic rabbis, suffering is ultimately from God.¹²³⁸ One does not eagerly seek after it, but when it does come, midrashim, such as C.4, were designed to encourage Jews to not resist it, but to welcome it, and to see it as insignificant in comparison to its redemptive effect.¹²³⁹

Finally, on the topic of death, Kraemer argues that tannaitic literature contains two views about the subject: (1) that it is God-ordained and each person must succumb to it, even if one is completely righteous; and (2) that one's sin causes death; though no individual sin can be identified as the cause. There is a tension between these two views, Kraemer observes, which resists resolution.¹²⁴⁰ Our midrash clearly supports the second view, finding in death a redemptive benefit. But what is it about death that effects atonement? Kraemer draws on *Sifre Bamidbar* 112 to speculate that it is the element of suffering as a result of death that brings atonement. At least some tannaitic rabbis believed that people were sentient after death, which means they are fully aware of the

¹²³⁷ Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 67, 80.

¹²³⁸ Kraemer finds only two exceptions to this view in tannaitic literature: *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 6 and *Sifra Behuqotai* 3:6. See Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 90-91.

¹²³⁹ Kraemer argues that the kinds of responses to suffering on the individual level found in our midrash and other tannaitic halakhic texts is distinct from the Mishnah and Tosefta. In the halakhic midrashim, suffering at the individual level is given much more attention, and arguments are built to defend biblical notions of theodicy (e.g., that God is just and has a divine purpose behind suffering). Kraemer speculates the shift in the halakhic midrashim can be attributed in a large part to an increase in daily suffering during the third century, something that was not felt during the redaction of the Mishnah, which depicts an ideal vision of Judaism, untouched by the destruction of the Temple. Kraemer also argues that the Tosefta reflects more deeply on corporate loss and suffering than the Mishnah, which he believes is due in large part to the passage of time. As more distance is gained from the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis felt freer to comment on the loss. See Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 98-100. See also Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 51-101 for a comprehensive study of tannaitic views of suffering.

¹²⁴⁰ Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 86-89.

process of death and anything that happens thereafter. Suffering arises from the experience of death itself, along with any disrespect or harm that is dealt to a person or his/her body after death. It is these moments of suffering that bring atonement.¹²⁴¹

In addition to Isa 22:14, our midrash cites 1 Sam 3:14¹²⁴² and Ezek 37:13¹²⁴³ as evidence for death's atoning power. These two additional verses are not recorded in other parallel texts. Interestingly, 1 Sam 3:14, along with its accompanying explanation in the *Mekhilta*, specifically rejects sacrifices and offerings as (the solely?) legitimate means of obtaining atonement for the profanation of God's name. Interesting, as well, is the fact that Rabbi (Judah Ha-Nasi) is enlisted in the interpretation of Ezek 37:13. The reason for

¹²⁴¹ See David Kraemer, *The Meaning of Death in Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 40. See also t. Avodah Zarah 4:3, which promotes burial in the Land of Israel, arguing that it is equivalent to being buried under the Temple's altar. Commenting on the passage, Kraemer argues that the Tosefta is promoting the view that a person who dies needs atonement, and that this can be achieved by burial in the Land. As the altar was the place where one's sins were forgiven, so too burial in the Land has the same effect. The Tosefta's view goes one step further than the *Mekhilta*. While the latter understands death itself as having an atoning quality, the former states that atonement through death can only be activated in the Land. See Kraemer, *Meaning of Death*, 39-40.

¹²⁴² The citation is from Samuel's famous call narrative. Upon finally recognizing God's voice, God tells Samuel that God will enact punishment on Eli's house, because Eli's sons blasphemed God's name and Eli did not stop them. This incident occurs in 1 Sam 2:12-17. Eli's sons disregard God and the sacrificial process, demanding raw meat, instead of a portion of the boiled meat, in addition to taking the fat, which belongs to God. If anyone refused Eli's sons, they threatened to take the meat by force. God's refusal to allow atonement for sacrifices or offerings is fitting, as the crime the sons' commit is in violation of the sacrificial system. However, it is never explicitly mentioned in 1 Samuel that Eli or his sons ever receive punishment. Instead, Eli's sons die when the Philistines capture the ark, and Eli dies soon after, upon hearing of the ark's capture (1 Sam 4:10ff). Our midrash appears to infer that the punishment is death, and then further seems to infer that death brings atonement. In 1 Sam 3:14, God states that sacrifices or offerings will not atone (יִתְכַּפֵּר), which can be read as indicating that another means (death, in the midrash's case) can. The fact that Eli's sons' crime was blaspheming God's name works well with the midrash, which seeks to explicate R. Ishmael's fourth division, the profanation of God's name. The midrash takes 1 Sam 3:14 to mean that the profanation of God's name cannot be atoned for by sacrifices or offerings.

¹²⁴³ This passage comes from the so-called valley of dry bones oracle. In this prophetic vision, Ezekiel is transported by God to a valley full of bones. God tells Ezekiel to command the bones to reassemble and return to life. The bones indeed do, and standing before Ezekiel is a multitude of people. God reveals to Ezekiel that these people are all of Israel. God then commands Ezekiel to tell Israel that God will open their graves, and return them to life in the Land. Rabbi seems to be working with certain presuppositions in explicating the text. Resurrection and return to the Land seem to mean nothing other than the World to Come. It is self-evident that at least some have died—and will continue to die—without ever having received full atonement for all of their sins during their lifetime. Since the Ezekiel text states that they will be resurrected and be in the Land, one can gather from this that the act of death itself is a form of atonement.

the inclusion of these two other verses is not readily apparent. R. Ishmael does not count them among his four scriptural passages. They may have been additional interpretations that the redactor thought to preserve, or were intended as a reinforcement of the fourth division in the face of resistance to it.¹²⁴⁴ At the very least, for an oral culture, the addition of Rabbi's comment facilitates the memorization of the midrashim, helping weave together R. Ishmael's midrash (C.4) with Rabbi's (C.5).

6.5.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Those Christian readers who have studied Yom Kippur practices in school or non-academic settings, or even dialogued with Jews about the Day of Atonement or attended a service, will notice a variety of resonances between tannaitic descriptions of Yom Kippur and contemporary Jewish practices. However, for many Christian readers, the tannaitic solutions to atonement after the loss of the Temple will likely be new information, and because they are new, careful thought and consideration are warranted. For readers who believe the Sinai covenant is still in effect between God and Israel, but have wondered how redemption was possible for Jews in the centuries that followed the destruction of the Temple, these tannaitic responses fill this gap, detailing precisely how Jews can receive atonement without the Temple. For readers who believe the Sinai covenant ended with the coming of Christ or was fulfilled by Christ, the tannaitic responses may offer a useful challenge, an opportunity to consider the possibility of a rabbinic solution to the loss of the Temple, a solution that perhaps need not stand in

¹²⁴⁴ It is notable that other parallel texts (see footnote 1203) have R. Eleazar correcting R. Matia b. Heresh that there are three divisions, instead of four.

contradiction to the solution offered by Christ's atoning death,¹²⁴⁵ but may serve as a parallel response, grounded exegetically in the biblical text, just as NT approaches are.

Whether or not one accepts these tannaitic responses as possible, the responses contain within them various insights worth consideration. R. Ishmael's four divisions can dialogue with one's own understanding of the process of reconciliation with God. None of the Christian commentators outline that process in their exegesis of the Decalogue—and one would not expect them to, as the biblical text itself does not. However, Augustine does note in reference to the motivation clause of the First Commandment that imitating good people causes the forgiveness of sins.¹²⁴⁶ In other places, Augustine maps out two types of penance, depending on the severity of one's sin.¹²⁴⁷ According to Augustine, serious sins, known as mortal sins (*mortifera*), were adultery, heresy, murder, idolatry, stealing, bearing false witness, creating schisms, astrology, rape, and fornication.¹²⁴⁸ If one committed a serious sin, one had to undergo a process known as canonical penance, in which a person could not take the eucharist or share meals with non-penitents.¹²⁴⁹ Such a person apparently went to a special place in the church known as the *locus paenitentium*.¹²⁵⁰ The length of time the penance lasted was as long as was necessary for each penitent.¹²⁵¹ What specific actions a penitent took during the time of penance is not detailed in Augustine's writings. In contrast, if one committed a minor sin, one had to undergo a process known as daily penance. This consisted of reciting the Lord's Prayer

¹²⁴⁵ E.g., see Matt 26:26-29; Mk 14:22-25; Lk 22:14-39; Hebrews 7-10.

¹²⁴⁶ *En. Ps.* 108.15.

¹²⁴⁷ See Allan Fitzgerald, "Penance," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 640-646. I am indebted to Fitzgerald's identification of pertinent sources in the Augustinian corpus and his analysis of these sources.

¹²⁴⁸ *F. et op.* 19.34; *s.* 56.8.12.

¹²⁴⁹ See *ep.* 153.6; *c. ep. Parm.* 3.2.13; *en. Ps.* 101.1.2

¹²⁵⁰ *C. Don.* 20.28.

¹²⁵¹ *Ench.* 17.64.

with the community each day. So long as one forgave others, one too was forgiven.¹²⁵² At the moment when the community recites “forgive us our sins,” each member of the community beat his/her chest to indicate the reality that they were all sinners and that each of them was called to forgive others.¹²⁵³

Today, the range of repentance rituals among evangelicals is broad, from a sacramental rite requiring absolution by a priest to an individual affair consisting of spontaneous prayer. Many find formal structure beneficial or necessary, while others believe it inhibits genuine remorse. Whatever one’s view of repentance may be, aspects of R. Ishmael’s four divisions of atonement may be illuminating. For example, one may find helpful the division of sins into categories of severity requiring certain responses. This is something Augustine and some Christian denominations do as well; though, typically there are only two categories, venial (less serious sins) and mortal (serious sins).¹²⁵⁴ Adding more distinction between sins could facilitate one’s ability to understand, process, and respond appropriately to what one has done. In addition, one may also find beneficial the rabbinic insistence on correcting the harm one caused with one’s neighbor before receiving forgiveness from God. There is a tendency among Christians to believe, like Augustine, that one’s own absolution only requires that one ask God for forgiveness and forgive others, as well. This is a common interpretation of the Lord’s Prayer, “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”¹²⁵⁵ Restitution is not necessarily expected or encouraged. Indeed, one is called to forgive others as soon as one is able and regardless of whether the other ever seeks forgiveness.

¹²⁵² *S.* 17.5; *Jo. ev. tr.* 58.5.

¹²⁵³ *En. Ps.* 54.14.

¹²⁵⁴ The distinction is usually made in reference to Jas 2:10-11.

¹²⁵⁵ Matt 6:12.

If one of the purposes of forgiveness is to reestablish one's relationship with another, then, as the tannaitic rabbis point out, repair of the harm done may actually be a crucial part of repentance. In this line of thought, the onus is not on the person harmed to forgive, but on the person who caused the harm to repair the damage. It is only when this has been achieved that the person harmed is called to forgive.

Furthermore, it may be worth considering whether it is helpful to think of death and suffering in the ways the tannaitic rabbis do. For some, it would be too difficult to entertain this possibility for a variety of reasons. For others, it may offer a fresh perspective into the difficult experiences of their lives. Often, in evangelical circles, suffering is thought of as a test of faith, akin to the kind Jesus or the biblical character Job experienced.¹²⁵⁶ Yet, there may be other avenues to explore. As the tannaitic rabbis make clear, in their line of thought, suffering is never sought after, nor should any individual sin be correlated to one's death. Rather, when pain and loss do come, a person can experience in it a sense of redemption. In considering this possibility, perhaps one may be granted new insight into Christ's suffering and death, or perhaps gain a new sense of what it means to take up one's cross and follow Christ in his passion and death.

6.6 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* C.5

Rabbi says: For violations of laws, such as those preceding the commandment: "Thou shalt not take," repentance alone brings forgiveness. In cases of violations of laws, such as follow the commandment: "Thou shalt not take"—including the commandment: "Thou shalt not take" itself—repentance makes the matter pend and the

¹²⁵⁶ See Job 1:6-12.

Day of Atonement brings forgiveness. What commandments are like those preceding the commandment: “Thou shalt not take”? Positive and negative commandments which carry no penalty with them—thus excepting the commandment: “Thou shalt not take” itself. And which are like those following the commandment: “Thou shalt not take”? Matters subject to the penalty of death at the hands of the human court, death at the hand of heaven,¹²⁵⁷ excision¹²⁵⁸ by the hand of heaven,¹²⁵⁹ forty stripes, sin-offerings, and trespass-offerings. And the commandment: “Thou shalt not take” is classed with them.

The point of interest for us in this midrash is its contrast with the previous one. Rabbi here outlines his own position on atonement, which can be summarized in the following table:

	Sin	Act	Outcome
Type 1	Breaking positive & negative commandments – no specified penalty	Repentance	Forgiven
Type 2	Breaking positive & negative commandments – penalty specified (i.e., death by human or divine court, excision, forty lashes, sin-offerings, and trespass offerings) & Exod 20:7	Repentance	Suspends matter
		Day of Atonement	Atonement

Rabbi’s position is notably simpler than R. Ishmael’s, and is not bolstered by textual evidence.¹²⁶⁰ Rather than death and corrections by suffering, in Rabbi’s schema, one needs only repentance and the Day of Atonement to obtain atonement for the violation of Exod 20:7. Notably, Rabbi’s schema appears immediately after Rabbi’s support of R.

¹²⁵⁷ Instead of מיתה בידי שמים (death by the hands of heaven), the Oxford manuscript has מיתה בידי אדם (death by the hands of a human/humanity). This removes God from being directly involved in the death of a person.

¹²⁵⁸ The word for “excision” is כרת. See footnote 1195. In this context, the meaning is not entirely clear. At a most basic level, it conveys the sense of a severe punishment dealt by God. It also seems to have a sense of cutting off.

¹²⁵⁹ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks בידי שמים (by the hands of heaven), which is not entirely necessary, as כרת is by definition done by God.

¹²⁶⁰ There are more than a few positions attributed to Rabbi. E.g., b. Shevuot 12b-13a, in which, according to R. Zera, Rabbi once stated that all sins, whether one repents or not, are forgiven during the Day of Atonement, except three instances: dismantling the yoke (i.e., denying God), revealing the face of Torah (i.e., intentionally interpreting Torah incorrectly), and severing the covenant of the flesh (i.e., rejecting circumcision). Repentance is necessary in these instances for the Day of Atonement to atone.

Ishmael's fourth distinction, which as stated above, facilitates memorization in an oral culture, but also reveals one of the primary characteristics of rabbinic compilations, that variant and even contradictory answers are often juxtaposed, and a "correct" interpretation is frequently left unidentified.

6.6.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Rabbi's schema offers another way to think about sin and atonement. The absence of suffering and death as means of atonement may ultimately be more compelling to some. Its two- part structure parallels Augustine's closely, where less serious sins require repentance, and more serious sins necessitate more. As stated above, for Augustine, if one commits a mortal sin, one is obliged to undergo canonical repentance. Similar to Augustine, some denominations today require a formal process of confession, often involving a minister, formulaic prayers, and an act of penance. Rabbi's schema, along with R. Ishmael's, brings to focus the notion that a day within the yearlong calendar cycle should be designated for the atonement of serious sins. Marking significant days throughout the year is essential to human experience, memory, and development. Just as birthdays, anniversaries, religious and secular holidays, etc. help people remember, commemorate, and grow from certain experiences, so too might a day in which a Christian community focuses on atonement. Indeed, it may not be theologically possible to consider a particular day as bringing atonement, as this may conflict with one's understanding of Christ's atonement. But marking a day within a year that centers on repentance may encourage communal participation and cultivate a sense of awe and significance that may help address the gravity of some sins, which might otherwise be

difficult to process and overcome if one underwent repentance on one's own or in the absence of a larger community.

Which day that might be, and what might be the constituent components of that day would require more contemplation. It might be tempting to select Yom Kippur; though, for many, that may be theologically difficult, while for others, it may conflict with a desire to refrain from cultural/religious appropriation.¹²⁶¹ The various components and practices of Yom Kippur laid out in tannaitic literature may, nevertheless, serve as inspirations for the development of a Christian community's own practices. For example, righting wrongs one has committed over the course of the year, and then fasting, confessing communally, and praying throughout a day may cultivate in profound ways a sense of reconciliation with God and with those one has harmed. For many Christians, the Season of Lent serves this purpose. Lenten practices often include fasting (from food and/or something one enjoys), prayer, reconciliation (as a sacramental or informal practice), and acts of charity. These are often understood as forms of penance or mechanisms that facilitate self-reflection, which prepare one for Easter. The tannaitic emphasis on תשובה (repairing harm one has caused another individual) *before* Yom Kippur could complement Lenten practices and further prepare one for the themes and experience of reconciliation during Easter. For those who do not observe Lent, it may be worth considering creating an annual day akin to Yom Kippur, in which communal fasting, confession, and prayer take place. Such a practice may provide a powerful means to facilitate reconciliation with God and one's community, particularly those one has harmed.

¹²⁶¹ On this matter, see p. 480.

6.7 CONCLUSION FOR THIRD WORD

The *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the Third Word uniformly considers the commandment a prohibition on swearing falsely by God's name. This immediately leads to a serious problem. If, as Lev 5:4-6 states, false oaths require a sacrifice, then what is a violator of Exod 20:7 to do in the absence of the Temple? The *Mekhilta*'s first answer is a penalty of lashes (C.1). The *Mekhilta* then follows this with an argument that one should not swear by God's name at all. In the process, it underscores the reality that God interacts with Israel in two ways, as Judge and non-judge (e.g., provider, comforter, teacher, companion, etc.). If one elects to swear by God's name, then God will become one's judge (C.2).

The discussion of God as judge draws the *Mekhilta* back to the topic it began with, the place of repentance in relation to the commandment. The language of *לֹא יִנָּקֶה* ("the Lord will not acquit") in Exod 20:7 leads to a question of whether it contradicts *וְנִקָּה לֹא נִקָּה* ("God will clear; God will not clear") in Exod 34:7. The *Mekhilta*'s solution is that God will forgive those who repent, but will not forgive those who do not (C.3). The *Mekhilta* then continues the topic of repentance with two discussions revolving around the process of atonement for violators of the commandment. For R. Ishmael, repentance, the Day of Atonement, death, and suffering are required (C.4). For Rabbi, it is repentance and the Day of Atonement (C.5).

In his exegesis (C.5), Rabbi classifies Exod 20:7 with other commandments that require lashes for violations, which brings the *Mekhilta* full circle back to where it began: the relation between lashes and the violation of Exod 20:7. In all, the *Mekhilta* has gone about its interpretation of Exod 20:7 by bringing a variety free-floating midrashim into an

associative flow that together ensures the possibility of forgiveness, despite the loss of the Temple, while concurrently giving due warning about the consequences of violating the commandment.

Meanwhile, the Christian commentaries' heavy focus on moving the meaning of Exod 20:7 beyond false oaths, in addition to a belief in Christ's atoning death, has led the Christian commentators, by and large, away from the topics of repentance and atonement. When the evangelical commentaries do touch on these topics, the approaches and conclusions are quite distinct from the *Mekhilta*: Hamilton notes that a "ritual expiation" is required for a violation of Exod 20:7, but does not indicate what that would look like in a post-Temple reality. Meanwhile, Rykan argues that Christ has achieved forgiveness for the violation of Exod 20:7, but does not delve into any particulars about the repentance process.

From a comparative theological perspective, the difference between the rabbinic and Christian commentaries affords an opportunity for evangelicals to consider the interpretations contained in the *Mekhilta*. For me, the ways in which the evangelical commentaries expand the meaning of Exod 20:7 are exegetically supported and compelling. The *Mekhilta*, I believe, supplements these interpretations by offering possibilities for considering what forms repentance might take for violations of the commandment. Of course, the practices the *Mekhilta* outlines need not be thought of simply in relation to Exod 20:7, but can apply to all expressions of God's will. Indeed, the *Mekhilta* itself makes this move when it presents the classifications of sin made by R. Ishmael and Rabbi.

7.0 CHAPTER 7: *MEKHILTA D'RABBI ISHMAEL*: FOURTH WORD

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

-Exod 20:8-11

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The *Mekhilta*'s commentary on the Fourth Word of the Decalogue is located in the continuation of *Bahodesh* 7.¹²⁶² This commentary can be divided into twelve distinct midrashim, which I have identified as D.1 through D.12 for convenient referencing. The exposition in this chapter concentrates on ten of the twelve:

1. Midrash D.1 – which discusses the relationship between “remember” in Exodus' Sabbath commandment and “observe” in Deuteronomy's
2. Midrash D.2 – which argues for adding non-Sabbath time to Sabbath time
3. Midrash D.3 – which proposes ways in which one might increase one's anticipation of the Sabbath
4. Midrash D.4 – which finds scriptural proof for reciting a benediction to sanctify the day at the entrance of the Sabbath and during the day
5. Midrash D.5 – which argues that Sabbath rest involves both the body and the mind
6. Midrash D.7 – which identifies the sons and daughters of Exod 20:10
7. Midrash D.8 – which identifies the servants of Exod 20:10
8. Midrash D.9 – which identifies the גר (*ger*) of Exod 20:10
9. Midrash D.11 – which determines whether God can rest, and the impact of this on the meaning of the motive clause

¹²⁶² Lauterbach, 328-331. The Horowitz-Rabin edition gives the Babylonian annual cycle's weekly lectionary divisions priority over the Palestinian “triennial cycle” original to this text and labels this section *Yitro* 7 with a secondary identification as *Bahodesh* (229-231).

10. Midrash D.12 – which determines ways in which the Sabbath is blessed and sanctified

The procedure I will follow in explicating and comparing the material in this chapter will be the same as the other *Mekhilta* chapters. In the concluding remark for the Fourth Word, I will discuss the role the *Mekhilta* might play in (re)evaluating the meaning and significance of the Sabbath for evangelicals. As the various evangelical commentators I cite will point out throughout this chapter, there is a wide range of beliefs among evangelicals surrounding the Sabbath commandment. Some believe it is now obsolete, others believe it is still in force, while still others believe Christians are now to observe the Lord's Day. Regardless of one's views about the continued purpose of the Sabbath, and regardless of which day one chooses as a day of rest or celebration, I will propose in the conclusion that a meaningful consideration of the *Mekhilta*'s practices can assist an evangelical in gaining a new appreciation of the day or even refine or adopt new practices, which can facilitate the vigor and depth of one's engagement with that day.

7.2 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.1

Remember the Day of the Sabbath to Keep It Holy. "Remember" and "observe" (Deut. 5.12) were both spoken at one utterance. "Everyone that profaneth it shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 31.14) and: "And on the Sabbath day two he-lambs" (Num. 28.9) were both spoken at one utterance. "Thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy brother's wife" (Lev. 18.16) and: "Her husband's brother shall go in unto her" (Deut. 25.5) were both spoken at one utterance. "Thou shalt not wear a mingled stuff" (Deut. 22.11) and: "Thou shalt make thee twisted cords" (ibid., v. 12) were both spoken at one utterance. This is a manner of speech impossible for creatures of flesh and blood. For it is said: "God has spoken one utterance which we have heard as two," etc. (Ps. 62.12). And it also says: "Is not My word like as fire? saith

the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?”¹²⁶³
(Jer. 23.29).

Upon first examination, this midrash offers an explanation for why two different versions of the Sabbath commandment can be found in Exodus and Deuteronomy’s Decalogues. A modern critical reader may not see a substantial issue with the existence of two versions, assuming the one in Exodus was spoken at Sinai, while the one in Deuteronomy was given by Moses forty years later on the plains of Moab on the eve of entering the Promised Land.¹²⁶⁴ In this diachronic view, it would be understandable that one version of the Sabbath commandment begins with זכור (“remember”), while the other with שמור (“observe”), as four decades have passed since the revelation at Sinai, and Moses is now recalling or interpreting the original commandment. However, to a rabbi, the potential discrepancy is highly problematic, as both the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions are assumed to be not two separate versions, but one, given at Sinai at one time. In this view, the fact that the Sabbath commandment begins with “remember” in Exodus and “observe” in Deuteronomy requires serious explanation. This is what our midrash seeks to do.

Our midrash’s solution is that God spoke both זכור (remember) and שמור (observe) simultaneously (בדבור אחד נאמר). The midrash then lists three other pairs of commandments that were also spoken at the same time. The first of each pair gives one version of a commandment, while the second appears to contradict it:

¹²⁶³ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks וּכְפֹטִישׁ יַפְּצֵץ סֶלֶע (and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces). The Horowitz-Rabin edition notes that the manuscripts contain the Jer 23:29 quotation, while the printed editions lack it. See p. 410ff below for the significance of this.

¹²⁶⁴ See Deut 1:1-6.

First	Second
You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; <u>everyone who profanes it shall be put to death</u> ; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people (Exod 31:14).	<u>On the Sabbath day</u> : two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering—this is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering (Num 28:9-10).
You shall not uncover <u>the nakedness of your brother's wife</u> ; it is your brother's nakedness (Lev 18:16).	When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. <u>Her husband's brother shall go in to her</u> , taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her (Deut 25:5).
<u>You will not wear clothes</u> made of wool and linen woven together (Deut 22:11).	<u>You shall make tassels</u> on the four corners of the cloak with which you cover yourself (Deut 22:12).

In the first pair, no one is to work on the Sabbath; and yet, everyone is to offer a burnt offering, when slaughtering and cooking are otherwise prohibited. In the second, no man is to have intercourse with his brother's wife; and yet, a man must marry and have intercourse with his brother's wife if his brother dies without a child.¹²⁶⁵ In the third, no one is to wear clothes that weave together wool and linen; and yet, one should fit tassels to one's cloak, apparently without regard for this mixing.¹²⁶⁶ The midrash then states that

¹²⁶⁵ For more on levirate marriage, see Dvora Weisberg, *Levirate Marriage and the Family in Ancient Judaism* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2009). See pp. 39-43 for tannaitic understandings of levirate marriage. See also Moshe Drori, "Levirate Marriage and Halizah," in vol. 12 of *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., ed. Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Keter Publishing House, 2007), 725-729.

¹²⁶⁶ The third pair may at first seem opaque. Wool and linen woven together is known as a particular kind of forbidden mixture (*kil'ayim*) called *sha'amez*. As Deut 22:11 (cf. Lev 19:19) indicates, this is prohibited. Menachem Raab writes that during the talmudic period, men typically wore a *tallit*, or a garment with four corners, throughout the day. This *tallit* had *tzitzit* (tassels) attached at each corner in fulfillment of the commandment to attach *tzitzit* to one's garment (Num 15:38 and Deut 22:12). Today, one might associate a *tallit* with prayer, and indeed, in various Jewish circles, it is referred to as a "prayer shawl" in English. During the talmudic era, however, this garment was part of one's regular day garb (see

while humans are incapable of making two utterances simultaneously, Ps 62:12 proves that God can do this. It then cites Jer 23:29, which states that God's word is like fire and like a hammer that breaks rocks into pieces.

The relationship between all of the elements of this midrash is not readily apparent. As Azzan Yadin observes, the midrash, as a whole, seems to claim that God can speak contradictory statements that are nevertheless true.¹²⁶⁷ However, while the latter three pairs follow this theme, the first pair clearly deviates. The two versions of the Decalogue in the first pair are indeed different from each other, but they are *not* contradictory, as the semantic range of זכור and שמור overlap.¹²⁶⁸ Yadin notes further oddities with the last three pairs: (1) though they ostensibly promote the possibility that God can speak in contradictions, that goal is undermined by the fact that there are far greater contradictions in the Torah that would prove this point even more forcefully and dramatically; (2) the midrash seems to single them out as unique, but does not identify how exactly they are unique; (3) they claim that humans cannot self-contradict in this way, but humans are known all too well to implement laws, and then provide contradictions, or exceptions. Furthermore, Yadin observes, while Ps 62:12 fits well into the midrash, proving that God can speak two (contradictory) words simultaneously,

b. Shabbat 10a, 25b; b. Menahot 39b). Today, Orthodox Jewish men (and some other Jews) wear an undergarment that serves the purpose of fulfilling this commandment. What our midrash seems to be addressing is the possibility of a garment with tassels, in which one is made of wool, and the other of linen. In such an instance, our midrash states, it is possible for one to be made of wool and the other to be made of linen. A similar ruling can be found in b. Nazir 58a, b. Menahot 39b, and b. Yevamoth 3b-4a. The Bavli passages operate with the following principle: that when a positive commandment and negative commandment contradict each other, one should follow the positive commandment, so long as the negative commandment is minor. If the same principle is operating in our midrash, then the positive commandment is to wear *tzitzit*. The negative commandment is to not mix wool and linen. The positive commandment outweighs the negative, thereby allowing one to wear a *tallit* and *tzitzit* that are of wool and linen. See Menachem Raab, "The Tallit," *Journal of Jewish Music and Liturgy* 24 (2001-2002): 19-21.

¹²⁶⁷ Azzan Yadin, "The Hammer on the Rock: Polysemy and the School of Rabbi Ishmael," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 10:1 (2003): 10-12.

¹²⁶⁸ Yadin cites Gen 37:11 and Ps 103:18 as proof.

Jer 23:29 seems out of place, not proving anything readily apparent. In what follows, I offer an explanation of the relationship between all of the elements of the midrash, which will in turn help in uncovering the midrash's meaning. I will begin by tracing a recent scholarly debate about the possible existence of polysemy in our midrash and other parallel midrashim in tannaitic, amoraic, and talmudic sources. This will set the foundation for my own interpretation of our midrash. I have chosen to review the recent scholarly debate at length, as the concept of rabbinic polysemy is a topic of growing interest among evangelicals.

Parallels to our midrash occur in thirteen other tannaitic and amoraic texts.¹²⁶⁹ Of these, the text that has garnered the most attention among scholars is b. Sanhedrin 34a:

אמר אביי דאמר קרא (תהלים סב, יב) אחת דבר אלהים שתיים זו שמעתי כי עז לאלהים. מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים, ואין טעם אחד יוצא מכמה מקראות. דבי ר' ישמעאל תנא (ירמיהו כג, כט) וכפטיש יפוצץ סלע. מה פטיש זה מתחלק לכמה ניצוצות אף מקרא אחד יוצא לכמה טעמים.

Abbaye said: The verse says, “One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that might belongs to God [and faithfulness is Yours, O Lord]” (Ps 62:12). A single verse (מקרא) results in several meanings (טעמים) but a single meaning does not result from several verses. It was taught in the School of Rabbi Ishmael: “Behold, My word is like fire—declares the Lord—and like a hammer that shatters rock” (Jer 23:29). Just as this hammer produces [literally: divides into] many sparks, so a single verse has several meanings.¹²⁷⁰

The special interest accorded this text in recent scholarship has been because of the text's promotion of polysemy. According to Susan Handelman, the R. Ishmael School (RIS) in b. Sanhedrin 34a proposes that multiple meanings can be drawn from a biblical text through a process of “shattering,” of breaking up a text into smaller pieces and examining

¹²⁶⁹ Y. Nedarim 3:2 [37d]; y. Shevuot 3:8 [34:b]; *Mekhila Shirata* 8; *Sifre Devarim* 233; *Sifre Bamidbar* 102; *Midrash Tannaim* 5:12, 22:12; *Mekhila d'Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai* 20:1, 8; b. Sanhedrin 34a; b. Shabbat 88b; b. Shevuot 20b; b. Rosh Hashanah 27a. *Sifre Bamidbar* 42 also cites Ps 62:12 and Jer 23:29, but does not parallel the structure, content, or any other scriptural citations that are found in *Mekhila Baḥodesh* 7.

¹²⁷⁰ Translation from Yadin, “Hammer,” 1.

them independently of the rest of the verse.¹²⁷¹ The biblical text, according to RIS, is the “rock” in Jeremiah, and the rabbinic interpretive approach is the hammer. Only in smashing the text to pieces—thus creating multiple meanings—can a fuller understanding be obtained. Handelman identifies what she believes to be an oddity in RIS’s commentary of Jer 23:29: the verb for “produces” is מתחלק, a *hitpael* participle of חלק, which gives the verb a reflexive sense: the hammer splits itself. The verb one would expect is מחלק, a *piel* participle, which gives a transitive sense: the hammer splits the rock. Handelman sees in this a helpful ambiguity: מחלק is meant, but מתחלק is written. This unexpected move reveals and exemplifies the circular process of interpretation. The rock splits the hammer simultaneously as the hammer splits the rock. Put another way, the text affects the interpreter simultaneously as the interpreter affects the text. Handelman argues that modern scholars of midrash are not exempt from this phenomenon.

David Stern, however, finds Handelman’s exegesis of b. Sanhedrin 34a inadequate.¹²⁷² Stern begins by noting that there is no oddity in the use of מתחלק, as the *hitpael* often appears with a transitive sense in rabbinic Hebrew. For Stern, the real issue is the referent of the hammer. Is the hammer a metaphor for the biblical verse or the *interpretation* of the biblical verse? To answer this, one must examine RIS’s statement in light of Abbaye’s in b. Sanhedrin 34a. According to Abbaye, one verse can have multiple

¹²⁷¹ See Susan Handelman, “Fragments of the Rock: Contemporary Literary Theory and the Study of Rabbinic Midrash—A Response to David Stern,” *Prooftexts* 5:1 (January 1985): 89-90. This essay was written in response to David Stern’s review of Handelman’s book: *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982). For Stern’s review of Handelman’s monograph, see David Stern, “Moses-Cide: Midrash and Contemporary Literary Criticism,” *Prooftexts* 4:2 (May 1984): 193-204.

¹²⁷² David Stern, “Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies? Susan Handelman and the Contemporary Study of Midrash,” *Prooftexts* 5:1 (January 1985): 102-103. Stern’s interpretation of b. Sanhedrin 34a is part of his rejoinder to Handelman’s response to his critique of her book.

meanings, but multiple verses cannot have the same meaning.¹²⁷³ RIS's statement should be understood in a similar way: one verse can create multiple meanings. Thus, the hammer is the biblical verse itself. Upon contact, it creates multiple sparks, or meanings.¹²⁷⁴ Stern points out that RIS's interpretation never identifies the person using the hammer. What the interpretation does, however, is make clear that there is a qualitative difference between sparks and hammer, or interpretations and biblical text: while the former dissipates after contact, the latter remains.¹²⁷⁵

Yadin notes that "sparks" do not appear in Jer 23:29; they are actually introduced by the rabbis, and take the place of the smashed rock.¹²⁷⁶ What seems to be happening, according to Yadin, is that the rabbis introduce "sparks" to aid them in their effort to read Jeremiah against its plain sense.¹²⁷⁷ The context of Jer 23:29 is a discourse about false prophecy and how the word of God smashes it like a hammer on a rock. The rabbis take the image of the rock, and instead of reading it as false prophecy, choose to interpret it as

¹²⁷³ Stern explains Abbaye's interpretation more in his book *Midrash and Theory*. See David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 17. In order to construct this interpretation, Abbaye reads *אחת* (once) and *שנים* (twice) in Ps 62:12 as substantives (one and two, respectively), instead of adverbs (once and twice).

¹²⁷⁴ Stern states that in order to construct this interpretation, RIS reads against the plain sense of Jer 23:29. In Jeremiah, the hammer splits the rock into pieces in a similar way to God's word, which splits false prophecy into pieces. However, for RIS, the hammer itself makes sparks, and the rock never enters the conversation. The notable rejection of the plain sense of the text raises the question of the impetus behind the interpretation. It appears that RIS was attempting to understand why Jer 23:29 employed two similes instead of one. Jeremiah begins with "my word is like fire" and then says "like a hammer that breaks the rock." RIS's solution is that the second simile provides further information for the first. The fire in the first simile is the sparks in the second. In other words, God's word is like fire, or fiery sparks created by a hammer when it hits a rock (Stern, "Literary Criticism," 102-103).

¹²⁷⁵ A decade later, Stern returned to his interpretation of b. Sanhedrin 34a. Here, he seems to identify the hammer, not with the biblical text itself, but with the act of interpretation. This effectively makes the rock the biblical text. The sparks are still the interpretations. Stern does not explain the shift in his interpretation, but the shift does not fundamentally change his argument. See Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 17-18.

¹²⁷⁶ See Yadin, "Hammer," 1-4.

¹²⁷⁷ Stern's solution in "Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies," 102-103, n. 2 does not seem plausible to Yadin. According to Yadin, the Bavli has standard methods to deal with redundant biblical texts, which would not require the solution that Stern suggests.

God's word. The act of smashing, then, is understood as the creation of multiple interpretations—that is, God's word is polysemic. The hammer that does the smashing, in the rabbinic interpretation, is midrash or the act of rabbinic interpretation. At this point, the rabbis halt. Jeremiah's text would lead to the conclusion that God's word must be smashed, or destroyed, as it were. The rabbis, however, do not want to claim that this can or should happen. So, to avoid this outcome, they introduce the imagery of the sparks. Like the hammer making contact with the rock, midrash knocks against God's word. Instead of shattering God's word, sparks emerge, or the myriad interpretations that the text bears.

We turn last to Daniel Boyarin, who suggests that determining the setting RIS has in mind for its simile is the interpretive key to RIS's comment.¹²⁷⁸ When the hammer strikes the rock in RIS's comment, נִיצוֹצוֹת fly from the contact of the hammer. To Boyarin, the meaning of this word depends on how one interprets its setting. If RIS has in mind a quarry, then it is "fragments" of a rock that fly, as the hammer smashes the rock to pieces. If RIS has in mind a blacksmith shop, then it is sparks. Boyarin argues for the latter, using as evidence other locations in rabbinic literature, where the image of sparks from a blacksmith's hammer is intended.¹²⁷⁹ If, then, RIS has in mind a blacksmith's shop, it seems that RIS understands "fire" in Jer 23:29 to be the sparks that fly when the hammer makes contact with the rock. Thus, it would appear that both the sparks of "fire" and the "hammer" in Jer 23:29 should be understood as God's word. Put another way, neither the "fire" nor the "hammer" are to be understood singly as God's word; rather, the

¹²⁷⁸ Daniel Boyarin, "Shattering the Logos—or, The Talmuds and the Genealogy of Indeterminacy," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 3, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 290-294.

¹²⁷⁹ B. Bava Qamma 32b and *Tanḥuma Vayeshev* 1.

entire image—of the hammer swinging down and causing fiery sparks to fly—is God’s word.¹²⁸⁰

If, as b. Sanhedrin 34a states, R. Ishmael’s School promotes polysemy, then it would seem reasonable to conclude that our midrash, which is also apparently from R. Ishmael’s school, presumes and promotes polysemy, as well. Within the *Mekhilta*, there is another text that is similar to b. Sanhedrin 34a: *Mekhilta Shirata* 8, which states:

מי כמוך באלים יי. מי כמוך באלו שאחרים קוראין אותם אלוהות ואין בהם ממש, ועליהם נאמר פה להם ולא ידברו וגו'. אילו פה להם ולא ידברו, אבל מי שאמר והיה העולם אינו כן, אלא אומר שני דברים בדיבור אחד, מה שאי אפשר לבשר ודם לומר כן, שנאמר אחת דבר אלהים שנים זו שמענו וגו'. הלא כה דברי כאש וגו'. וכתוב והגה מפיו יצא.

Who Is Like unto Thee Among the Gods, O Lord. Who is like unto Thee among those whom others call gods, in whom there is no substance and of whom it is said: “They have mouths but speak not” (Ps. 115.5). These have mouths and cannot speak. He by whose word the world came into being, however, is not so, but He can say two words in one utterance, a manner of speech of which human beings are incapable, as it is said: “God had spoken once, twice have we heard this,” etc. (Ps. 62.12); “Is not My word like as fire,” etc. (Jer. 23.29). And it is written: “And a sound goes out from His mouth” (Job 37.2).¹²⁸¹

Here, similar to our midrash, God is said to be capable of what humans are not: of speaking two words simultaneously; and similar to both our midrash and b. Sanhedrin 34a, it cites Ps 62:12 and Jer 23:29. The resemblance in language and citations suggests that *Mekhilta Shirata* 8 is related to our midrash and b. Sanhedrin 34a, and that when read together, all three can offer a better understanding of rabbinic polysemy. However, while Yadin sees a relation between the three texts, he rejects the possibility that the R. Ishmael midrashim support polysemy, despite the fact b. Sanhedrin 34a states that it does.

¹²⁸⁰ Boyarin also points out that in b. Qiddushin 30b, RIS identifies the hammer as the *yetzer ha-ra*. In this reading, the rock smashes the hammer, as Torah smashes the *yetzer ha-ra*. While Sanhedrin takes into account the entire verse of Jer 23:29 in its interpretation, Qiddushin singles out the section on the hammer and the rock and leaves the rest. While one might be tempted to see in each tractate an incompatible interpretation of Jeremiah, and thus a tension within the RIS itself, Boyarin sees the acting out of Sanhedrin: that with any given verse, multiple interpretations are possible.

¹²⁸¹ Translation is Lauterbach’s.

Polysemy, Yadin argues, is more the province of the R. Aqiva school. In contrast, R. Ishmael and his students were reserved in their interpretive approach.¹²⁸² He questions if *Mekhilta Shirata* 8 and our midrash are original to R. Ishmael or his school.¹²⁸³ Whether or not they are, they simply do not support polysemy. *Mekhilta Shirata* 8 is a commentary on Exod 15:11 (“Who is like you among the gods”). Rather than promoting polysemy, the primary intent of this midrash is to portray God as superior to idols.¹²⁸⁴

As for our midrash, based on the reasons mentioned earlier in this section,¹²⁸⁵ Yadin argues the last three pairs of our midrash are not original.¹²⁸⁶ If one were to remove these pairs, what the midrash seems to be doing is nothing more than offering an explanation for why the Decalogue’s Sabbath commandment begins with both

¹²⁸² Yadin, “Hammer,” 5-7. Yadin is responding, in part, to Hananel Mack’s article: “Torah Has Seventy Aspects—The Development of a Saying,” in *Rabbi Mordechai Breuer Festschrift: Collected Papers in Jewish Studies*, vol. 2, ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Akademon, 1992): 449-462. Mack argues that polysemy developed in a progressive order, beginning with our midrash and *Mekhilta Shirata* 8, and culminating in b. Sanhedrin 34a. Yadin cites three examples to prove his point: (1) while the R. Aqiva school finds interpretive meaning in particles like ׀ and ׀, RIS treats them just as particles (e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:14); (2) while the R. Aqiva school interprets the infinitive absolute of a verb juxtaposed with a finite form of the same verb as having two separate meanings, RIS sees the infinitive absolute as simply adding an emphatic sense (e.g., *Sifre Bamidbar* 112); (3) while the R. Aqiva school believes it can gain meaning from an unnecessary ׀, RIS disagrees (e.g., b. Sanhedrin 51b). All of these indicate that the R. Aqiva school is more open to expansive interpretations—and therefore more supportive of polysemy—while RIS’s restraint indicates more reservation about polysemy. See also Yadin’s *Scripture as Logos*, 69-79 for an expanded form of his argument.

¹²⁸³ He suggests that RIS is only responsible for halakhic midrashim; the provenance of aggadic midrashim in R. Ishmael compilations is unclear. Yadin cites the following in support of this view: Louis Finkelstein, “Sources of Tannaitic Midrashim,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 31:3 (Jan. 1941): 214; Avraham Goldberg, “The School of Rabbi Aqiva and the School of Rabbi Ishmael in Sifre Devarim §§1-54,” *Teudah* 3 (1983): 9-16; and Menahem Kahana, *The Two Mekhiltot on the Amaleq Portion: The Originality of the Version of the Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael with Respect to the Mekhilta of Rabbi Shim’on ben Yohay* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 19-24. Since our midrash and *Mekhilta Shirata* 8 are aggadic, they cannot be trusted as authentically RIS. (It is not clear to me how Yadin finds *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 7 to be non-halakhic.) Moreover, the title “Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ishmael” can only be traced back to the geonic era (Yadin follows Kahana, *The Two Mekhiltot*, 25), which effectively calls into question the extent to which this midrashic collection has any connection to R. Ishmael before or during the talmudic era (see Yadin, “Hammer,” 6-7).

¹²⁸⁴ Yadin, “Hammer,” 8-9. While idols cannot even speak, God can speak two words simultaneously. The midrash then cites Ps 62:12 and Jer 23:29 as evidence of this; the midrash also cites Job 27:2.

¹²⁸⁵ See pp. 403ff.

¹²⁸⁶ Yadin, “Hammer,” 10-12.

“remember” and “observe.”¹²⁸⁷ The midrash, rather than hiding or explaining away this oddity, puts it front and center, and uses it as an opportunity to underscore God’s transcendence: while humans can only speak one word at a time, God can speak two. The midrash then cites Ps 62:12 as proof. Without the other three pairs, the midrash works perfectly. The only strange element left is Jer 23:29, which does not seem to operate as a proof-text at all for God speaking two words simultaneously. Rather, it seems out of place, which suggests that Jer 23:29 is also not original to our midrash.

This analysis leads Yadin to the following theory of evolution: (1) our midrash authored the phrase “both were said in a single saying”; (2) this phrase became a known formula, which *Mekhilta Shirata* 8 employed in its midrash; (3) our midrash was edited once or multiple times, gaining the addition of the last three pairs; (4) in a separate but related period of time, R. Ishmael interpreted Deut 27:2-8 to mean that the Torah was inscribed in seventy languages¹²⁸⁸; (5) the idea of Torah in seventy languages became a known concept; (6) it is used in b. Shabbat 88b as an explanation of Jer 23:29, arguing that the sparks the hammer creates are likened to God’s word, which God divides into seventy languages; (7) b. Shabbat 88b’s argument is reworked to argue for polysemy in b. Sanhedrin 34a: God’s word is now divided into multiple interpretations, instead of seventy languages¹²⁸⁹; (8) at some point, a redactor, familiar with b. Sanhedrin 34a and

¹²⁸⁷ As noted at the beginning of this section, the rabbis understood the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy to be one single revelation given at one moment in time, instead of two versions given at different times. This assumption creates a problem that must be accounted for: two different words—“remember” and “observe”—that begin the Sabbath commandment.

¹²⁸⁸ Found in *Mekhilta Deuteronomy*. See Solomon Schechter, “The Mekhilta Deuteronomy Pericope *Re’eh*,” in *Tif’eret Yisra’el: Festschrift zu Israel Lewy’s siebzigsten Geburtstag*, eds. M. Brann and J. Elbogen (Breslau: Marcus, 1911), 187-192.

¹²⁸⁹ Yadin speculates that the similarity of כל דברי in Deut 27:8 with כה דברי in Jer 23:29 may have caused an association between the biblical texts, which then led to a modification of the original midrash found in *Mekhilta Deuteronomy* (see Yadin, “Hammer,” 15-16).

its use of Jer 23:29, added the jeremian verse to our midrash.¹²⁹⁰ Thus, what we have is a gradual progression, from R. Ishmael's straightforward exegetical solution to "remember" and "observe" in our midrash, to an eventual (anonymous) promotion of polysemy in the name of R. Ishmael's school in b. Sanhedrin 34a. Returning briefly to our midrash, Yadin states that whether or not Jer 23:29 is original to the text, it is not an argument for polysemy. Rather, it is employed, along with Ps 62:12, to argue for something quite different: not that each biblical text has more than one meaning, but that God can speak two words at the same time.¹²⁹¹

Boyarin agrees with Yadin that b. Shabbat 88b should not be understood as conveying the same message as b. Sanhedrin 34a. While the latter speaks of multiplicity of meanings, the former is referring to multiplicity of translations. Boyarin also agrees with Yadin that polysemy is absent in RIS, but then extends Yadin's theory to argue that polysemy is absent in the whole of Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic thought until the sixth century.¹²⁹² It is only at this point, Boyarin argues, that a group of anonymous editors of the Bavli, called the Stammaim,¹²⁹³ began promoting the concept of polysemy, and began arguing for midrashic and halakhic indeterminacy.¹²⁹⁴ Before the sixth century, editors of Palestinian compilations and the pre-stammaitic Bavli were keen to

¹²⁹⁰ Yadin observes that *Yalkhut Shimoni* and the printed editions of the *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* do not have Jer 23:29, but admits that these are late sources. He then offers more convincing evidence: a parallel text to *Mekhilta Bahodesh 7* in *Sifre Devarim* 230 has Ps 62:12, but not Jer 23:29 (see Yadin, "Hammer," 13). See also the textual variants in footnotes 1263.

¹²⁹¹ Yadin, "Hammer," 12-17. See also Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 69-79.

¹²⁹² Boyarin, "Shattering the Logos," 295-296; Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2004), 183-184. According to Boyarin, the closest the Palestinian rabbis got to polysemy was the belief that the Torah could be translated into (seventy) other languages. This is the point R. Yoḥanan, an amoraic third century rabbi from the Land of Israel, makes in b. Shabbat 88b. The point is also made in a tannaitic text: m. Sotah 7:5.

¹²⁹³ See footnote 64 for more on the Stammaim.

¹²⁹⁴ That is, the inability to determine the (singular) "correct" interpretation or practice. According to Boyarin, this led the Stammaim to valorize endless midrashic and halakhic investigation and debate.

juxtapose multiple interpretations, determining “correct” views only when it came to practice. None of them, however, provided an explicit statement or theological reflection on the possibility of polysemy or indeterminacy in their literature. Such a move only comes with the Stammaim, who not only created a theology of polysemy and indeterminacy, but used it as the guiding force behind a final-stage editing of the Bavli.¹²⁹⁵ Texts such as b. Sanhedrin 34a are a product of their creation. This is not to say that the Stammaim were different in kind from the rabbinic generations before them, but that they continued a trajectory that began with the earliest rabbinic editors. Boyarin believes that before the Stammaim, there was a “reluctance” among the pre-stammaitic Palestinian and Babylonian editors to determine “correct” interpretations and beliefs. The tannaitic and amoraic collections of midrash and halakhah were the result of their reluctance. The polysemic theology that the Stammaim then developed when reflecting on these collections was mistakenly seen by generations after the Stammaim as a theology already present in the pre-stammaitic Palestinian and Babylonian editors.¹²⁹⁶

However, when it comes to the meaning of our midrash, Boyarin’s understanding departs from Yadin’s.¹²⁹⁷ Boyarin asserts that the Yerushalmi and its midrashic parallels¹²⁹⁸ set up the Decalogue’s “remember” and “observe” as an apparent

¹²⁹⁵ Boyarin, “Shattering the Logos,” 280-281; *Border Lines*, 152, 183-184. Boyarin adds that since, as Yadin argues, the Shabbat text is earlier than the Sanhedrin one, Boyarin sees clear evidence that polysemy is not inherent to the whole of rabbinic Judaism, but a promotion of the Stammaim.

¹²⁹⁶ Boyarin, “Shattering the Logos,” 284-285; and *Border Lines*, 152, 183-184. See also *Border Lines*, 192-201 for a description of a similar phenomenon occurring in Christianity with the narratives surrounding the development of the Nicene Creed. Boyarin speculates that while rabbinic Judaism promoted polysemy as a way to legitimize rabbinic authority, Christianity adopted monovocal truth to claim patristic authority. Both of them, however, are similar in that they rejected “rational decision making processes through dialectical investigation” to arrive at their distinct positions (quotation from p. 200). For the Church Fathers, truth becomes singular, descended from heaven. For the rabbis, Scriptural interpretation, halakhic, and indeed truth, becomes indeterminate.

¹²⁹⁷ Boyarin, “Shattering the Logos,” 297-298.

¹²⁹⁸ Y. Nedarim 3:2 [37d]. Boyarin does not cite the midrashic parallels explicitly. It seems he has in mind, at the very least, our midrash and *Sifre Devarim* 233.

contradiction. If Exodus and Deuteronomy record the same revelation of the Decalogue, their language must be the same. The fact that they do not creates the potential contradiction. The Yerushalmi and its parallels go on, like our midrash, to cite several additional laws that other sections of Torah apparently contradict. These texts then state that all of the laws *and* their apparent contradictions come from God: God spoke once, and humans received both the law and its seeming contradiction. Since they all come from God, humans must find a way to resolve the apparent contradictions. The Yerushalmi and its parallels all employ Jer 23:29 to prove their point. What they mean in citing Jeremiah is that God's revelation acts like a hammer: like a swinging hammer upon a rock, God speaks once; and like multiple sparks flying from the contact with the rock, humans hear two seemingly contradictory statements, which then must be resolved in order for humans to hear God correctly. Thus, Boyarin concludes from his analysis that within the Palestinian texts, the interpretation of Jer 23:29 is not identical to its interpretation in b. Sanhedrin 34a (only on this point do Yadin and Boyarin agree). While Sanhedrin promotes polysemy, the Palestinian texts argue that a single meaning can be found in more than one place in Torah. This single meaning may appear with different or seemingly contradictory language, but upon thorough examination, one discovers that it is one meaning, nonetheless.

Both Boyarin and Yadin make abundantly clear that there is a distinction between our midrash and those that promote polysemy in the Bavli (viz., b. Sanhedrin 34a). These Bavli texts have taken earlier traditions, as represented in texts like our midrash, and reworked them for their own purposes. Our midrash, then, possesses a meaning that does not fall within the realm of polysemy. Yadin makes a strong argument about the

development of our midrash. If one wanted to interpret a more original version, one might follow Yadin's argument and peel away the three pairs of verses after "remember" and "observe," along with the Jer 23:29 quote. One would then be left with the following:

Remember the Day of the Sabbath to Keep It Holy. "Remember" and "observe" (Deut. 5.12) were both spoken at one utterance. This is a manner of speech impossible for creatures of flesh and blood. For it is said: "God has spoken one utterance which we have heard as two," etc. (Ps. 62.12).¹²⁹⁹

Depending on one's goals, that is a possible direction to take. My approach, however, throughout this dissertation has been to interpret the *Mekhilta's* midrashim as they appear in critical editions (with attention to textual variants). Thus, in what follows, I will attempt to interpret the entire midrash as it appears in Lauterbach's edition.

As Yadin has argued, whether or not one removes the additional layering in our midrash, it does not support polysemy. Boyarin's interpretation that our midrash is dealing with apparently contradictory laws in Torah captures much of the midrash's meaning, and I would only emphasize that while our midrash may be dealing with apparent contradictions, underneath this is an attempt to promote a contextual method of applying Torah. By contextual, I mean that our midrash argues that certain *mitzvot* require one to examine the rest of Torah, to seek out other *mitzvot* that are relevant to them. To forego this process would result in an incorrect observance of one *mitzvah* and/or a possible breaking of another. In the case of Exod 31:14, if one did absolutely no work on the Sabbath, one would fail to offer the burnt offering prescribed in Num 28:9. Not only would one break Num 28:9, one would also fail to worship God properly by depriving God of the double burnt offering. In the case of Lev 18:16, if a man never had

¹²⁹⁹ Translation is Lauterbach's.

intercourse with his brother's wife, he would fail to continue his brother's line should his brother die childless.¹³⁰⁰ Not only would he break Deut 25:5, but would also misunderstand the familial bonds that are formed by marriage and protected both by Lev 18:16 and Deut 25:5-10.¹³⁰¹ In the case of Deut 22:11, if one never mixed wool with linen, one would never fix *tzitzit* made of one of the fibers to the *tallit* made of the other (Deut 22:12). Not only might one break Deut 22:12 (e.g., if one only possessed the opposite material to affix to the *tallit*), but one would not fully understand the meaning of שֶׁטָּטַן (mixed fibers) as it applies to clothing in Deut 22:11.

Finally, in the case of Exod 20:8, if one only remembered the Sabbath, one would never actually observe it (Deut 5:12). Exodus commands cognition, while Deuteronomy commands action; both are necessary for proper Sabbath observance. Our midrash, however, goes much deeper than this. With the citation of “remember” and “observe,” I believe that our midrash intends that one will examine the entirety of the Sabbath commandment as it appears in Exodus and Deuteronomy, bring together every component, and work out the full contextual meaning of the commandment.¹³⁰² If one did this, one would find two areas in the commandment that demand further attention.

¹³⁰⁰ In rabbinic understanding, “son” includes any descendant. See *Sifre Devarim* 288 and Weisberg, 43.

¹³⁰¹ In marriage, a man has exclusive sexual rights to his wife. Leviticus 18 spells out the ways in which blood relatives cannot violate this right. Our midrash singles out Lev 18:16, which specifically prohibits a brother from violating the right. But marriage also brings certain responsibilities and forms various bonds. In the case of Deut 25:5, brothers have responsibility to each other. If a married man dies without producing a child, his brother is obligated to marry the man's wife in order to continue his deceased brother's line. (Even though our midrash does not address this, there are indeed various instances in which a man can break his levirate bond with his brother's wife, set out in Deut 25:7-10.) For analysis of tannaitic discussions of this and the ceremony of breaking the bond (known as *halitza* and performed today whenever this situation occurs), see Weisberg, 39-43.

¹³⁰² This is contrary to the view, as expressed by the Maharal of Prague (1525-1609), who states in *Gur Aryeh*, a commentary on Rashi, that the rabbis chose not to examine the motive clauses of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy, because the motive clauses were not significant enough to garner attention. Maharal argues that the “essence” of the commandment is what matters, and that essence is captured in “remember” and “observe.” For the text, see Ezra Zion Melammed, “‘Observe’ and

In the first, Exod 20:10 states that *וְכָל-בְּהֶמְתְּךָ* (“your livestock”) must rest, while Deut 5:14 states *וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֹמֶרְךָ וְכָל-בְּהֶמְתְּךָ* (“your ox and your donkey, and all your livestock”) will not do any work. If one were to bring these two sections together and see them not as part of separate commandments, but as part of a single passage, one would have a general statement (*וְכָל-בְּהֶמְתְּךָ* in Exod 20:10), followed by a particular statement (*וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֹמֶרְךָ* in Deut 5:14), followed by a general statement (*וְכָל-בְּהֶמְתְּךָ* in Deut 5:14). This pattern falls under one of the *Thirteen Middot of R. Ishmael*:

כלל ופרט וכלל אי אתה דן אלא כעין הפרט

[if] a general statement is followed by a particular instance and then by a general statement, you must interpret according to the character of the particular instance.¹³⁰³

Interestingly, this particular case is treated in t. Bava Kama 6:18.¹³⁰⁴ Here, R. Yose, in the name of R. Ishmael, employs the *middah*, and reasons from the *middah* that the *mitzvah* can only apply to subjects that are similar to the specification. Since the specification only identifies subjects that possess life, it is clear that the *mitzvah* applies to any subject that has life. In other words, the Sabbath commandment directs one to let all of one’s living creatures rest. R. Yose’s solution fits well with our midrash.

The second discrepancy is that two reasons are offered for the Sabbath commandment and Israel’s consequent rest: in Exodus, God consecrated the Sabbath as a remembrance of God’s act of creation; in Deuteronomy, God reminds Israel that God

‘Remember’ Spoken in One Utterance,” in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, ed. Ben-Zion Segal, English version ed. Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1990), 203.

I believe my proposal can be supported by the fact that the last three pairs in our midrash only cite a small portion of each commandment. One must know the rest of the text that is cited to understand what each pair is doing. Similarly, I argue, one must know the entire Sabbath commandment in Exodus and Deuteronomy to understand the intent of our midrash.

¹³⁰³ See Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 98. Translation is Yadin’s. See also my discussion of the *Thirteen Middot of R. Ishmael* on pp. 360ff.

¹³⁰⁴ For a brief discussion of the matter, see Melammed, 208.

redeemed it from slavery in Egypt. What our midrash seems to be doing here by invoking “remember” and “observe” is indicating that both reasons are equally relevant for keeping the Sabbath. There is a theological point being made: one must keep the Sabbath in order to commemorate God’s act of creation *and* act of redemption. To take one without the other would be to uphold only half of the Sabbath’s significance.¹³⁰⁵

Thus, from these examples, our midrash shows that some biblical verses require that one bring them into relation with each other. The goal of bringing these verses together is to ensure that each individual *mitzvah* is observed correctly. The way in which our midrash proves this point scripturally is through its exposition of Ps 62:12 and Jer 23:29. As Yadin argues, both verses are understood to mean that God is able to speak words simultaneously. The first, Ps 62:12, is the most straightforward: during the revelation at Sinai, at certain moments, God spoke one word, which humans heard as two. Indeed, as the midrash exclaims, “This is a manner of speech impossible for creatures of flesh and blood.” Humans can only speak one word, which is in turn heard as only one word.

The second citation, Jer 23:29, is more difficult, as its exact meaning is not readily apparent. I am convinced by Yadin’s argument that it was not original to the midrash. But now that it *is* part of the midrash, at least according to the manuscripts, among other textual witnesses, its meaning, as Yadin argues, would seem to support the

¹³⁰⁵ God also adds *וְאִמְתָּהּ, כְּמוֹךָ* (so that your male and female slave may rest like you) at the end of Deut 5:14. This phrase may give the impression that it comes at the end of the sentence that precedes it. However, it also seems possible that it is connected to the sentence that follows, Deut 5:15: *... וְזָכַרְתָּ, כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם...* (and you will remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt...). If this is the case, one should be motivated to allow one’s servants to rest, because one was a slave once in Egypt, having no rest until God brought redemption. Understood in this way, our midrash could be saying that one should allow one’s servants to rest, not only because Israel too was once enslaved, but also because even servants are created in God’s image and deserve to be treated as such.

message of Ps 62:12. I believe the way in which it functions is to metaphorically extend Ps 62:12. While Ps 62:12 states that one divine utterance can be heard as two words, Jer 23:29 increases the number that can be heard dramatically. The Jeremiah passage states that each divine utterance is like fire. As one fire can divide into several, so too God's word. Similarly, each divine utterance is like a hammer. As a hammer splits one rock into many, so too God's word causes multiple words from one utterance.¹³⁰⁶ In this way, Ps 62:12, along with "remember" and "observe," introduce the possibility of God speaking two words from one utterance. Then, Jer 23:29 and the other three sets of passages reveal the full implications of this phenomenon: from one utterance can come multiple words. The purpose is not merely to impress Israel, though God's ability to do this exemplifies God's transcendence.¹³⁰⁷ More importantly, the purpose of these divine speech acts is to communicate that these laws were given simultaneously, and thus must be considered together—that is, in light of each other. Implicit in the simultaneity is unity within multiplicity. The many words heard from a single divine utterance are one. Together, they reveal the intricacies of God's will.

7.2.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The discrepancies between Exodus and Deuteronomy's version of the Sabbath commandment do not come up in Augustine's exegesis. However, it is worth noting that Augustine believed in a form of polysemy. In his understanding, a scriptural text could

¹³⁰⁶ The sound of a hammer crashing and the imagery of fire has clear resonances with the stormy imagery during the revelation at Sinai.

¹³⁰⁷ See *Sifre Bamidbar* 102, another tannaitic text which makes a similar argument about God's ability to speak and hear what humans cannot.

contain any number of meanings, even ones that the original author may not have intended, so long as those meanings do not violate the double commandment of love of God and neighbor.¹³⁰⁸ The discrepancies, however, do garner attention among the evangelical commentators. Stuart finds no real difference between the two versions, as both operate the same way and hold the same requirements. He argues the discrepancies are the result of the different circumstances in which they were given. The Exodus version was revealed when the covenant was established (thus, the motive clause centers on creation), while the Deuteronomy version was given as part of a renewal of the covenant with a new generation (thus, the motive clause recalls the exodus from Egypt).¹³⁰⁹ Fretheim and Dozeman similarly believe the different versions of the Sabbath commandment are the product of changing circumstances and development.¹³¹⁰ However, in contrast to Stuart, Dozeman believes there are significant differences between the Exodus and Deuteronomy versions. Most notably, the two are indicative of different theologies of memory in Exodus and Deuteronomy. In the latter, Israel is obligated to remember Israel's salvation history; thus, "observe" is used, because when Israel remembers it, Israel will be compelled to observe the Sabbath commandment. In contrast, in the former, God and Israel must work together. Both must remember their history and their relationship—and help each other remember—lest either of them forget what has been obligated. Thus, Israel is commanded to remember the Sabbath, which will in turn assist God in remembering the Sabbath as well.

¹³⁰⁸ *Doct. chr.* 1.36.40, 3.27.38; *conf.* 12. For an analysis of these texts, see Carol Harrison, "Augustine," in vol. 1 of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 690-692.

¹³⁰⁹ Stuart, 457.

¹³¹⁰ Fretheim, 229; Dozeman, 488-490.

In comparing the evangelical commentators to the *Mekhilta*, one notices that while the latter works strenuously to resolve any tension between the two Sabbath commandments, the former have little difficulty with the presence of discrepancies. This difference can be attributed, for the most part, to a difference in each's theology of the Bible. The evangelical commentators believe the Pentateuch is the product of a combination of inspiration and revelation: while sections, such as Exodus' Decalogue, were revealed directly by God,¹³¹¹ other sections, such as Deuteronomy's Decalogue, were inspired by the Holy Spirit. There is variety, however, in how evangelicals interpret the concept of inspiration. It can range from a more higher critical academic view¹³¹² that argues that various sources were written and then woven together over a long period of time, to a less critical traditional view that holds that Moses himself composed the entire Pentateuch. But even this less critical view acknowledges that the biblical text reflects changing circumstances, audiences, or situations.¹³¹³ In contrast, the *Mekhilta* presumes that the entire Torah was revealed at Sinai. The result is that changes in context, developments, and contradictions are impossible. The *Mekhilta*'s solution to possible discrepancies in the text is theological. It argues that God speaks multiple words in one utterance, which is another way of saying that commandments that might seem to be in tension with each other were actually revealed simultaneously from One Source. In order to understand them correctly, one must engage in contextual reading, gathering related *mitzvot* together and reading them in light of each other.

¹³¹¹ E.g., see Alexander, 101-102; Ashby, 84; Bruckner, 181; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 32-33; Coggins, 77-78; Fretheim, 223-224; Gowan, 180; Pokrifka, 215; Wiersbe, 108-109.

¹³¹² Viz., historical, redaction, and source criticism.

¹³¹³ See Stuart, 460, n. 55-57.

Among the evangelical commentators, Johnstone is unique in turning to Jewish sources to explain the discrepancies between Exodus and Deuteronomy's version of the Sabbath commandment. Johnstone draws on Rashi to affirm that both versions of the Sabbath commandment were spoken at the same time. The differences between the two commandments indicate that God's speech is understood by humans in numerous ways. In dealing with the discrepancies with the Sabbath commandment, he suggests that the goal should not be to harmonize them; otherwise, the rich debate occurring within the biblical text would be lost.¹³¹⁴ While Johnstone offers important insights, his view contrasts with the *Mekhilta* on two significant points. First, in arguing that humans understand God in numerous ways, Johnstone advocates a polysemic view of the text. The *Mekhilta*, in contrast, argues that multiple words come from one divine utterance, calling for contextual reading. Second, Johnstone operates with a theology of inspiration. The two versions of the Decalogue, in Johnstone's understanding, were the product of humans hearing God's word and recording what they *understood* God to be saying. In contrast, the *Mekhilta* argues that the Torah contains one utterance in the form of multiple words; it does not contain what humans understood God to mean.

The distinctiveness of the *Mekhilta*'s theology of Scripture may offer an alternative for some evangelical readers. Admittedly, it is a pre-critical view of revelation, one that some evangelicals may find too difficult to accept, as it would require one to reject the important discoveries of higher criticism over the last several decades. Even if this is the case, one might still appreciate the *Mekhilta*'s theological solution. In addition, the *Mekhilta* might still provide a beneficial alternative mode through which to

¹³¹⁴ Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35.

read the biblical text. A modern higher critical approach, in its effort to trace the development of the biblical text, can influence a reader to not focus as much on resolving discrepancies between various legal texts as the *Mekhilta* does. Contemporary commentators, with recourse to higher criticism, often uncover diverse messages in the biblical texts, which can be extremely insightful, as the evangelical commentators have shown. But unified interpretations, such as the *Mekhilta*'s, can also be insightful, as the rest of this chapter will reveal. To this end, the *Mekhilta* can help guide one in adopting its approach. Such an endeavor may break open the text in surprisingly beneficial ways, and help one discover a new unity within the multiplicity. To Johnstone's point, following the *Mekhilta*'s approach might be seen as a type of harmonization of the biblical text, but it would not suppress debate; rather, the many comments in the *Mekhilta* show that the debate would be moved from an internal debate within Scripture to the community that has now received it.

7.3 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA D.2*

Remember and observe. Remember it before it comes and observe it after it has gone.—Hence they said: We should always increase what is holy by adding to it some of the non-holy.— Thus it can be compared to a wolf¹³¹⁵ moving¹³¹⁶ backward and forward.

¹³¹⁵ Instead of לזאב (to a wolf), *Sefer Vehizhir* has לאב (to a father), while *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Simon b. Yohai* has לארי (to a lion). Lion would hold a relatively similar meaning, but a father would change the meaning quite dramatically, and is probably the result of a corrupted text or scribal omission of a single crucial letter. See the discussion below on the wolf.

¹³¹⁶ Instead of טורד (pacing), *Yalqut Shimoni* has טורף (preying or striking, or seizing forcibly), *Midrash Hakhamim* has טוהר (clean, or levitically clean), *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Simon b. Yohai* has עורר (there protesting or objecting), and *Sefer Vehizhir* has טרוד (busily engaging or troubled or anxious). Although the Horowitz-Rabin edition also has טורד, its note suggests that one should read according to the Yalqut. Lauterbach has translated טורד (pacing) based on the context.

This unit centers on two interpretations that reinforce one another in describing what it means to זכור (“remember”) and שמור (“observe”) the Sabbath. While D.1 understood the two words as distinct, our midrash appears to be operating with a method akin to the tenth rule of the so-called Thirty-Two Middot.¹³¹⁷ Our midrash does not see זכור and שמור as strict repetitions, but they do seem to overlap in semantic range. Rather than taking זכור and שמור as a mere redundancy or an emphatic expression, our midrash assumes each word has a unique meaning. The first interpretation begins by stating that the meaning of “remember” and “observe” is that one should “remember it [the Sabbath] before it comes and observe it after it has gone.” In other words, “we should always increase what is holy by adding to it some of the non-holy.” This is in reference to the duration of the Sabbath: one should add from non-Sabbath time to Sabbath time, so that the Sabbath is prolonged, both at the beginning and at the end. The comment is not attributed to any specific sage; it was a common phrase among tannaitic rabbis.¹³¹⁸

The unit moves immediately into the second interpretation, which consists of a comparison between the act of adding time to the Sabbath and a preying wolf pacing backwards and forwards.¹³¹⁹ It is not explicitly stated who or what the wolf symbolizes. It could be the Sabbath itself or a human. If the former, the Sabbath acts like a wolf that preys back and forth, seeking out more time at the beginning and end. If the latter, the

¹³¹⁷ This method deals with apparent repetitions in the Bible. In this method, there is a presupposition that the Bible does not repeat itself. Thus, expressions that appear to be identical must actually have distinct meanings. For further explanation and examples, see Strack and Stemberger, 24-25.

¹³¹⁸ In tannaitic literature, the phrase מוסיפין מחול על הקדש (they add from the profane to the holy) is applied to the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement, and festivals in *Sifra Emor* 11:14. It is also discussed in reference to the jubilee year in *Sifra Behar* 2:3. Here, it is asked whether the holiness of the jubilee year should be extended from the New Year to the Day of Atonement, since it is known that one adds from the profane to the holy. This is ultimately rejected.

¹³¹⁹ See footnote 1316 on the translation of טורף. The context of the comparison and rabbinic perceptions of wolves (see below) indicate טורף is best translated as “preying,” as attested in *Yalqut*.

wolf is like a human performing the same back and forth actions, in an effort to increase more time to the Sabbath. Either is possible. To help illuminate the midrash further, it will be helpful to ask what the rabbis thought of wolves. Wolves appear in multiple locations throughout tannaitic literature.¹³²⁰ The general sense from these texts is that wolves are predatory, untamed, hungry, agile, and ferocious. They are counted among other dangerous animals: lions, bears, snakes, tigers, and leopards—albeit, not as fearsome as lions or snakes.¹³²¹ They attack solo or in packs, targeting both animals and humans, young or old. They engage head on or sneak up from behind. They target the vulnerable areas of creatures. They have no sense of boundaries, attacking people’s livestock at will. However, they are also able to be tamed (how this can be done is not specified).¹³²² Bearing this in mind, our midrash’s parable of the wolf becomes perplexing. Is the Sabbath itself or humans to act like wolves? Are they to act ferociously, taking what is not theirs, in order to add more to the Sabbath? Perhaps the parable has another view of the wolf in mind, but absent of further information, our understanding can only be in reference to the available texts. The language of the comparison, “preying backward and forward,” suggests that the nature of the wolf—to have no sense of boundaries, to move where it will—is what the parable has in mind. It may also very well be that our midrash is also alluding to the determined, ravenous,

¹³²⁰ M. Bava Metzia 7:9; m. Bava Qamma 1:4; m. Hullin 3:1; m. Kilayim 1:6; m. Sanhedrin 1:4; t. Bava Metzia 2:2, 8:16-17; t. Berakhot 1:11; t. Qiddushin 5:15; t. Sheviit 7:12; t. Bekhorot 1:10, 4:6; t. Hullin 3:3; t. Yevamot 3:1; *Mekhilta Pisha* 12, 16; *Mekhilta Beshallah* 5, 6; *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 2; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 16; *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai* 14:19, 15:11, 18:23; *Sifra Beḥuqotai* 1:2; *Sifra Shemini* 2:3; *Sifre Bamidbar* 157; *Sifre Devarim* 352; *Bereshit Rabbah* 26:6, 57:4, 95:1, 99:1-4.

¹³²¹ On the ranking of dangerous beasts, see Jacob Neusner, *Praxis and Parables: The Divergent Discourses of Rabbinic Judaism: How Halakhic and Aggadic Documents Treat the Bestiary Common to Them* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 85-87.

¹³²² If a domestic animal is attacked by a wolf, lion, bear, snake, tiger, or leopard, the domestic animal cannot be saved, and no one is liable to make restitution for it. See Neusner, *Praxis and Parables*, 92-93.

audacious nature of the wolf. It is not that the Sabbath or humans should act unethically in order to increase the duration of the Sabbath. Rather, they are to adopt a similar nature to the wolf: to have no regard for boundaries, to act with determination, to traverse the boundaries that mark the sixth day and the first, taking a little of each, so that the length of the Sabbath might be increased.

7.3.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

For Augustine, the deeper significance of the Sabbath is its spiritual meaning. While the literal meaning is that one should abstain from servile work, the spiritual meaning is that one should abstain from sin.¹³²³ With the Holy Spirit, God gives humanity the ability to not sin, and when one places one's hope in God to no longer sin, that person is now celebrating the Sabbath. This is an eternal Sabbath, a day without end.¹³²⁴ It goes without saying that Augustine would find little value in the *Mekhilta's* midrash. To him, the *Mekhilta* would merely perpetuate the practice of those Jews who continue to observe the Sabbath literally.¹³²⁵ Augustine might even go so far as to say that there is no point in literally adding time to the Sabbath, since one can now enjoy the Sabbath eternally with the Spirit. If there is any adding of time that should be done, it is only in a spiritual sense, increasing the degree to which one does not sin.

There is a strong tendency among the evangelical commentaries to downplay the significance of the Sabbath. For example, Hamilton, in a similar way to Augustine,

¹³²³ *Spir. et litt.* 15,27; *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19

¹³²⁴ *S.* 8:6, 17-18; 9:6; 179A.3.

¹³²⁵ *Spir. et litt.* 15,27

argues that the rest that Israel experienced on the Sabbath gives way to the rest experienced by people when they convert to Christianity and take on Christ's yoke; it is an eternal rest that they will taste in this life, and experience in its fullness at the eschaton.¹³²⁶

There is, however, also a strong tendency to promote, and even reclaim, the importance of the Sabbath for Christians. Stuart, for example, points to Exod 31:13, 17, and states that the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant. When one observes the Sabbath, one is reminded of the covenant between God and Israel. In a similar way, when a Christian worships Christ weekly, he/she is reminded of the New Covenant of which he/she is a member. For Carpenter, the significance of the Sabbath is that it indicates Israel is God's people, created anew. When Israel practices the Sabbath, the image of God is restored in God's people. The Israelites need one day a week to focus on God; otherwise, they would come to neglect "their spiritual and religious sensitivities to Yahweh, their God. The divine awareness in their lives would have been snuffed out (cf. Luke 8:14)." The same is true of Christians: they, too, need the Sabbath to focus on God; otherwise, they will lose sight of God.¹³²⁷ For Fretheim, the Sabbath is a gift for Christians, which is reaffirmed in Mk 2:27, when Jesus states, "The sabbath was made for human beings, not human beings for the sabbath."¹³²⁸

For those evangelicals today who find continued significance in the Sabbath, taking it as a model for Christian practice or even observing the actual Sabbath itself (i.e., Saturday),¹³²⁹ the *Mekhilta* proposes a way in which one might "remember" and

¹³²⁶ Hamilton, 339.

¹³²⁷ Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44-46. Quotation from p. 44.

¹³²⁸ Fretheim, 229. Biblical quotation from Fretheim.

¹³²⁹ An example would be Seventh Day Adventists.

“observe” its significance. If the Sabbath truly is a gift or a day of worship, or is analogous to what one should experience one day a week, then as the *Mekhilta* states, one way to appreciate the gift or express one’s worship is to add from non-holy time to holy time. This would not only extend the length of the day, allowing one to worship God and experience God’s gift a little longer, but would also increase the holiness of the day—marking it as distinct from all other days—through its added length. If one imagines one’s dedication to the Sabbath like a ravenous and determined wolf, the challenge might not be to generate a reason to increase the length of the Sabbath, but to tame a desire to increase it as much as possible.¹³³⁰

7.4 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.3

Eleazar b. Hananiah b. Hezekiah b. Garon says: “Remember the day of the Sabbath to keep it holy,” keep it in mind from the first day of the week on, so that if something¹³³¹ good happens to come your way fix it up for the Sabbath. R. Isaac¹³³² says: You shall not count the days of the week in the manner in which others count them. But you should count them with reference to the Sabbath.¹³³³

¹³³⁰ Some Christians, especially Catholics, possess a practice known commonly as a weekly vigil Mass. These occur the Saturday before Sunday and satisfy the Sunday obligation of Mass. There is strong commonality between this practice and what the *Mekhilta* advocates. Indeed, the Christian practice may have roots in the Jewish way of measuring a day from sundown to sundown. Perhaps the sharpest distinction is that the vigil Mass is considered anticipatory of Sunday. Some may see it as the beginning of Sunday; others may see it as a fulfillment of a religious obligation. If it were to be seen as an actual *extension* of Sunday, where Sunday now begins Saturday evening, it would align with the *Mekhilta*’s argument to increase the length of the day, thereby adding the non-holy to the holy.

¹³³¹ The Constantinople Edition lacks הפץ (a desirable thing), making the “good” that comes one’s way more abstract, while the Venice Edition, Leghorn Edition, and the Horowitz-Rabin edition have מנה (share, portion) instead.

¹³³² Instead of יצחק (Isaac), the Munich Manuscript has נתן (Nathan).

¹³³³ Instead of לשם שבת (with reference to the Sabbath), the *Commentary on the Torah* (Hanover, 1839), p. 40 has ליום שבת (to the Sabbath day). The *Commentary* states clearly that one should count the Sabbath as the last day.

Similar to D.2, this unit centers on two interpretations that reinforce one another. This time, however, the center of focus is only on Exod 20:8, and the connection between remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy. In the first interpretation, R. Eleazar b. Hananiah b. Hezekiah b. Garon interprets “Remember the day of the Sabbath to keep it holy” to mean that from the moment the Sabbath ends Saturday night—i.e., the first day of the following week¹³³⁴—anything beautiful one might come across should be designated for the next Sabbath. In saving beautiful things for the Sabbath, one is sanctifying it, helping separate it from the other days, marking it as distinct, and as a time of celebration. One need not be frustrated, though, if nothing beautiful does come one’s way. The form of the verb נתמנה can carry the sense that something beautiful “is appointed to” a person, perhaps even by God. Understood in this way, there is an expectation that one will designate for the Sabbath the beautiful thing one has received. What constitutes “something beautiful” is not specified, and is perhaps intentionally ambiguous, so that any number of items (e.g., wine, food, clothing, place settings, etc.) may be reserved for the Sabbath.¹³³⁵ By orienting oneself in this way, ready, the moment

¹³³⁴ The word “week” does not appear in the midrash. The understanding of a seven-day cycle, or week, can be assumed, however, by the Sabbath commandment alone (Exod 20:11). The only day given a name is the Sabbath. According to Lauterbach, the others are referred to as the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth day after the Day of the Sabbath. See Lauterbach, 329, n. 7. Perhaps more accurately, the other days are in reference to the *next* Sabbath: thus, the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth day of the Sabbath. In this way, the numbers anticipate the next Sabbath. This is the standard practice today and fits our midrash more coherently.

¹³³⁵ See Franz Landsberger, “The Origin of the Ritual Implements for the Sabbath,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 27 (1956): 387-390. Landsberger discusses possible accoutrements, such as lamps, wine jars, serving dishes, and cups that may have been used in antiquity for Sabbaths. One of the items is a gold-leaf cup with a depiction of the Temple. The image of the Temple, Landsberger believes, is a messianic symbol. The use of this particular cup is meant to bring “Sabbath beautification.”

In a talmudic source, b. Beitzah 16a, Shammai is said to have saved good food he found throughout the week for the Sabbath, ruling that one should ready oneself for the Sabbath from the first day of the week. Shammai’s practice, however, is in tension with Hillel’s. While Shammai saw the week as a preparation for the Sabbath, Robert Goldenberg points out that Hillel was concerned about ensuring that one pay proper focus and devotion to God every day of the week, instead of just one. See Robert Goldenberg, “The Place of the Sabbath in Rabbinic Judaism,” in *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian*

the Sabbath ends, to reserve anything beautiful that has come one's way for the next Sabbath, one is organizing one's life around the Sabbath, heightening its significance, and thus sanctifying it.

The concept of orienting oneself around the Sabbath in the first interpretation leads to the second, in which R. Isaac teaches that the days of the week should be counted, not in the way others do, but “with reference to the Sabbath.” A modern person would refer to the days of the week as Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. In contrast, R. Isaac teaches that Saturday evening through Sunday evening should be referred to as *אחד בשבת* (first [day] in regards to/after the Sabbath); Sunday evening through Monday evening should be referred to as *שני בשבת* (second...); Monday evening through Tuesday evening as *שלישי בשבת* (third...), and so on in this manner till Friday evening through Saturday evening, which is referred to as *שבת* (the Sabbath). In this way, each day of the week leads in ascending numerical anticipation of the Sabbath, facilitating one's ability to remember the Sabbath, so that one may sanctify it. Assuming the tradent is correctly identified, and that R. Isaac is the same rabbi who is among the fourth generation of the tannaitic period, then the context in which he lived most likely is Palestine under Roman rule. Thus, the “others” that one is to avoid counting days with are, foremost, Greeks and Romans.

In the era of the *Mekhilta*, the Roman Empire operated under the calendrical system of Caesar Augustus (63 BCE-14 CE).¹³³⁶ As *pontifex maximus*, or greatest high

Traditions, eds. Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and William H. Shea (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 40.

¹³³⁶ The solar calendar had 365 days, with an additional day every four years added on the 24th of February. See Michele Renee Salzman, “Structuring Time: Festivals, Holidays and the Calendar,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 478-496; Denis Feeney, “Time and Calendar,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*, eds. Alessandro Barchiesi and Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 882-894. See also

priest, Augustus had the right to dictate Rome's perception and understanding of time. His father, Julius Caesar (100-44 BCE), had established a fixed solar calendar for the empire, which Augustus kept. Part of the solar calendar was the organization of days into eight-day¹³³⁷ weeks, which had been established during the middle republic (264-133 BCE). Each eighth day was designated as the *nundinae* (market day). This was the day in which farmers would come to town to sell their goods. The wife of the *flamen Dialis* (high priest) would sacrifice a ram to Jupiter to mark the day's special significance. Public assemblies (except law courts) were also suspended on this day.¹³³⁸ During the late republic (133-31 BCE), there is evidence of the use of a seven-day week, based on Hellenistic astrology,¹³³⁹ with the names of the seven (known) planets—Saturn, Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, and Venus—used, for these days, beginning in the second half of the first century CE.¹³⁴⁰ The eight-day cycle, however, remained the standard in the Roman Empire until well into the fifth century.

Denis Feeney argues that the Julian calendar, and its successive modifications, defined what it meant to be Roman—in both lifestyle and ideology. Following the Roman

Denis Feeney, *Caesar's Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 167-212; Daryn Lehoux, "Days, Months, Years, and Other Time Cycles," in *Time and Cosmos in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Alexander Jones (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 95-122; Robert Hannah, *Greek and Roman Calendars: Constructions of Time in the Classical World* (London: Duckworth, 2005).

There is little information about the Roman calendar between Augustus and 354 CE. From the evidence we have, Tiberius and Claudius appeared to have continued the practice of Augustus. The Codex Calendar of 354 CE indicates that there were no dramatic deviations from Augustus' practice.

¹³³⁷ The days were counted as nine according to the Roman counting system.

¹³³⁸ The eight-day cycle was tracked with the use of a *paraegmata*, which had two forms: as a book, and as an inscription, in which a peg was moved along a series of holes. The *paraegmata* were also used to track lunar cycles. Many people across the empire used both the Julian calendar and the *paraegmata* in tandem.

¹³³⁹ This astrological-based seven-day week appears to have been developed in Alexandria some time during the second century BCE. From there, it gained influence in Rome after Julius Caesar conquered Egypt, and then spread to the West. An increasing interest in astrology seems to have fueled its spread. See Eivatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 19-20.

¹³⁴⁰ During Constantine's rule, Sunday became a holiday for Sol.

calendar meant that one had adopted a Roman identity, that one was Roman (whether a citizen or not), politically, religiously, socially, economically, etc., and that one was now bonded to the rest of the Roman people across the Empire. Feeney goes on to note that the Romans did not impose their calendrical system universally across the empire. The calendar was adopted, by and large, in the west, but in the east, local calendars continued to be in use. Those who continued to use their own calendars coordinated them with the Roman calendar as necessary when Rome directly affected their lives.¹³⁴¹ Sacha Stern analyzes the influence of the Julian calendar on the Near East. It appears that as Rome conquered sections of the Near East, the spread of the Julian calendar was swift. Evidence from Judean Desert documents¹³⁴² show that early in the second century, the calendrical system in most of the Near East had become Julianized.¹³⁴³ Nevertheless, areas that contained high Jewish populations in Palestine seem to have kept a non-Julian, lunar calendar as the official calendar.¹³⁴⁴ But, as time drew on, during the third through fifth centuries, the rabbis came to accept a fixed calendar, which Stern argues was the result of Christian influence, a desire to synchronize holidays and fast days with the Babylonian rabbis, and more broadly, the dominant influence of the Roman Empire and its Julian calendar.¹³⁴⁵

In light of all of this, R. Isaac may have been part of an effort among rabbis in

¹³⁴¹ The reason why Rome never imposed its calendar, Feeney argues, has to do with such factors as the Roman preference for subsidiarity. See Feeney, “Time,” 890, 892; Feeney, *Caesar’s Calendar*, 210.

¹³⁴² These documents come mostly from the Babatha archive, dated to the second century. See Sacha Stern, *Calendar and Community: A History of the Jewish Calendar, 2nd Century BCE to 10th Century CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 23 and footnotes 112-113.

¹³⁴³ Sacha Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 290-293.

¹³⁴⁴ Stern points to Galen’s *In Hippocratis Epidemiarum Libros Commentarius* 3 as evidence. See Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 346 and footnote 147.

¹³⁴⁵ Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity*, 346, 352

particular, and Palestinian Jews more broadly, to resist Roman influence. If, as Feeney argues, adopting the Julian calendar meant adopting a Roman identity, then keeping a Jewish calendar meant keeping a Jewish identity.¹³⁴⁶ The way others organized the week was either around market days (eight-day cycle), or based on astrology (seven-day cycle), or named after the seven planets.¹³⁴⁷ The Jewish week, in contrast, was organized by the pattern of creation, and revolved around the Sabbath, a day in which no trade could be done, and a day that could not be measured by the celestial bodies; the six days leading up to it were simply named in numerical anticipation of it.¹³⁴⁸ In constructing the week in this way, R. Isaac makes clear that the Sabbath is integral to Jewish identity. Thus, it is absolutely essential that one remembers it.

7.4.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

According to Augustine, Jews observe the sabbath in a “servile fashion,” which includes “self-indulgence,” “getting drunk,” and women “dancing on balconies.”¹³⁴⁹ He also states that the Jews use their “free time” on “their frivolities and extravagances,” such as going to the stadium to join in faction fights.¹³⁵⁰ The *Mekhilta*’s argument to save something beautiful for the Sabbath is a far cry from what Augustine describes. As

¹³⁴⁶ For more on the rabbinic calendrical system, including division of years, months, and holidays, see Stern, *Calendar and Community*, 155-164; and Joseph Tabory, “Jewish Festivals in Late Antiquity,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, vol. 4, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 556-572.

¹³⁴⁷ There was also a method among the Egyptians of dividing thirty-day months into three ten-day weeks. The Egyptians used the first day of the week to help track time by charting the rising and falling of thirty-six stars. See Hannah, 87-88. Our tradent (or audience) may also have known about this Egyptian method and had it in mind when contrasting Israel’s way of counting the days from others’.

¹³⁴⁸ A comment for line 13 on p. 229 of the Horowitz-Rabin edition argues that R. Isaac believes one should not *name* (instead of count) the days the way others do, but rather, in reference to the Sabbath.

¹³⁴⁹ *Io. ev. tr.* 3.19. Translations are Rettig’s. See footnote 564.

¹³⁵⁰ *S.* 9.3. Translations are Hill’s. See footnote 579.

Cohen points out, the Jews of North Africa that Augustine observed were likely non-rabbinic Jews. The tannaitic rabbis, it seems, were also against the “servile fashion” of these Jews.¹³⁵¹ Rather than engaging in bacchanalian affairs, the *Mekhilta* is attempting to build up one’s anticipation and enjoyment of the Sabbath, so that one might make it holy (i.e., distinct). Such a practice aligns well with Stuart, when he argues that the Sabbath (or any day one designates as the Sabbath) should be a day of rest, in which one is replenished, which includes pursuing pleasurable activities.¹³⁵² Indeed, it aligns well with those evangelicals today who want to promote or reclaim the significance of the Sabbath for Christians. In addition to adding non-Sabbath time to Sabbath time, the *Mekhilta* also proposes saving something beautiful that happens to come one’s way for the Sabbath. As the *Mekhilta* argues, by doing this, one is organizing one’s life around the Sabbath (or whichever day one designates as a day of rest/worship), heightening its significance, and thus sanctifying it.

As for counting days in reference to the Sabbath, being a Roman citizen, Augustine most likely followed the Roman calendar. Tellingly, Augustine states that the most important day for Christians is not the Sabbath, but the Lord’s Day, the eighth day of the week, on which Jesus was resurrected (more on this in the conclusion).¹³⁵³ Augustine was following Christian precedent in emphasizing the significance of the Lord’s Day, but might also have had his own form of resistance to broader Roman practices of designating the eighth day as a market day, on which a ram was sacrificed to Jupiter.

¹³⁵¹ See m. Beitzah 5:2, and Shaye Cohen, “Dancing,” 29-51.

¹³⁵² Stuart 459-460. See also Currid, 44; Gilbert and Stallman, 51-52; Harman, 217; Mackay, 348-349; Page, 86; Ryken, 551-552, 560.

¹³⁵³ *Ep.* 55.17-23

Among the evangelical commentaries, the closest the commentators come to the topic of “counting days as others do” is in entertaining the question of whether the Sabbath is a unique institution or whether it was influenced by broader ANE culture. For example, Dozeman states that it may have developed from a Babylonian practice, in which people rested every full moon.¹³⁵⁴ In contrast, Larsson argues that the closest parallel to the Sabbath in the ANE is the Akkadian practice of dividing fifty consecutive days into seven, and designating each seventh day as unlucky. This is the exact opposite understanding of the biblical view of the Sabbath, which does not see the seventh day as luckless, but a blessing.¹³⁵⁵ A few commentators, however, move beyond this debate. For example, Larsson also states that the Sabbath follows the pattern of creation, rather than any discernable rhythm in nature (e.g., moon cycles).¹³⁵⁶ In addition, Johnstone argues that the Sabbath is special, in part because it alone is given a name, and all other days lead up to it.¹³⁵⁷ These interpretations have strong resonances with the *Mekhilta*, which takes these insights one step further. The *Mekhilta* argues that all other days of the week should lead up to the Sabbath, and that one should anticipate the Sabbath. If some material object of special beauty or especially fitting comes to a person, he/she should save it for the Sabbath.

This practice spurs a question for evangelicals: does the evangelical reader view the Sabbath or his/her worship day with anticipation? Does one look forward to it, or does it seem more like a burden, an obligation one must undertake, in order to get to the

¹³⁵⁴ Dozeman, 491-492. See also Ashby, 90; Bailey, 221; Johnstone, *Exodus 1-19*, 332; Motyer, 233.

¹³⁵⁵ Larsson, 147-148. See also Alexander, 102; Bailey, 221-222; Bruckner, 185; Carpenter, *Exodus 19-40*, 44, 46; Currid, 42; Garrett, 477; Gilbert and Stallman, 50-51; Motyer, 233; Pokrifka, 223; Roper, 328-329; Scarlata, 163.

¹³⁵⁶ Larsson, 148.

¹³⁵⁷ See Johnstone, *Exodus 20-40*, 33-35.

rest of the week? One suspects that at least some Jews in late antiquity also viewed the Sabbath as a burden, and in an effort to address this feeling, our midrash was constructed. Whether or not that is the case, our midrash provides ideas that begin a conversation of what would instill anticipation and joy of the Sabbath. Perhaps one way to do that would be to save beautiful things that come one's way for the Sabbath. Such an effort reveals that joy and inspiration are difficult to cultivate without tangible sources. It also provides another perspective on the beautiful things that come one's way, that they were not given by chance, nor were they given to be enjoyed immediately, but that they came precisely to cultivate anticipation and joy of the Sabbath.

7.5 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.4

To Keep It Holy. To consecrate it with a benediction. On the basis of this passage the sages said: At the entrance of the Sabbath we consecrate it by reciting the sanctification of the day over wine. From this I know only about the “sanctification” for the day. Whence do we know that the night¹³⁵⁸ also requires a “sanctification”? It is said: “Ye shall keep the Sabbath,”¹³⁵⁹ etc. (Ex. 31.14). So far I know only about the Sabbath. How about the holidays? Scripture says: “These are the appointed seasons of the Lord,” etc. (Lev. 23.4).

¹³⁵⁸ From אין לי אלא (I only know about) to ללילה מנין (from where do we know that the night), the Masoretic Text chapter 155 and *Midrash Hakhamim* have אין לי אלא בלילה ביום מנין (I only know about the night. From where the day?). Day and night are flipped; though, both night and day require a blessing. Meanwhile *Efat Zedek* has אין לי אלא בלילה ביום קדושה ללילה ליום מנין (I only know about the night of the day. From where do I know of the sanctification of the night of the day?). Here, night is clarified to mean the beginning of Sabbath, and the end of Sabbath is not present.

¹³⁵⁹ Instead of ושמרתם את השבת (and you will keep the Sabbath), *Midrash Hakhamim* and *Efat Zedek* have זכור את יום (remember the day), apparently attempting to create symmetry between Exod 20:8 and Exod 31:14; though, Exod 31:14 does use שמר (keep), rather than זכר (remember). Both textual witnesses appear to find no semantic overlap with שמר and זכר.

This section can be divided into two comments, with the first directly concerning the Sabbath, and second addressing festivals. (However, the second section also involves the Sabbath; see footnote 1366). The first comment takes the word לקדשו (“to sanctify it”) to mean that God is commanding Israel to make holy, sanctify, or mark as separate the Sabbath by making a ברכה (blessing). That blessing is said over wine בכניסתו (“with the entrance of the Sabbath”)—that is, in the evening of the sixth day. It is apparent from the wording—מכאן אמרו (“from here, they say...”)—that the blessing is an established practice. It existed among the rabbis, at least since the time of the Mishnah.¹³⁶⁰ Whether non-rabbinic Jews participated is unknown but ritual blessing over a cup of wine appears in the Last Supper narratives of the Gospels.

In a move characteristic of halakhic midrash, the issue for our midrash is finding legitimate scriptural proof for the existing practice. Our midrash begins by citing a known view that Exod 20:8 establishes the proof for the evening blessing with the entrance of the Sabbath.¹³⁶¹ This verse would appear ideal, because it argues that לקדשו (to sanctify it) is a requirement for remembering the Sabbath, thus giving the proof that one is to sanctify the day via the ritual of קידוש (*Qiddush*, i.e., reciting a blessing over wine). However, our midrash quickly rejects this view by pointing out that Exod 20:8 only mentions the *day* of the Sabbath: זָכוֹר אֶת-יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת (“remember the *day* of the Sabbath”). Here, Scripture only directs a person to recite a blessing during the daytime, not in the evening. So where does Scripture direct a person to recite an evening blessing with the

¹³⁶⁰ See m. Berakhot 8:1 and t. Berakhot 5:25. There is a debate in these two texts between the first-century houses of Shammai and Hillel whether one is to bless the day before the wine, or the wine before the day.

¹³⁶¹ In b. Pesahim 106a, the same tradition witnessed in our midrash appears as a baraita. Here, Exod 20:8 is taken to be the scriptural proof of reciting a blessing when the Sabbath begins at nightfall.

entrance of the Sabbath? Our midrash finds its proof in Exod 31:14,¹³⁶² and quotes the phrase 'ושמרתם את־השַׁבָּת וגו' (“and you will keep the Sabbath...”). Immediately after שמרתם את־השַׁבָּת comes the line כִּי קֹדֶשׁ הוּא in Exod 31:14. The NRSV translates the verse as “you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you.” Our midrash finds Exod 31:14 useful, because it contains the word קֹדֶשׁ (“sanctify”)—but lacks the word יוֹם (“day”)—in reference to the Sabbath. This gives our midrash what it needs to use Exod 31:14 as the scriptural proof for reciting an evening blessing over wine with the entrance of the Sabbath.¹³⁶³ Thus, by the end of the midrash, we are given scriptural proof for two Sabbath sanctification blessings: (1) in the evening with the entrance of the Sabbath, which is established by Exod 31:14; and (2) during the daytime of the Sabbath, which is established by Exod 20:10.

In the second section, our midrash turns to festivals. There are five primary festivals in the Jewish year, which are divided, according to Torah, into pilgrimage or non-pilgrimage festivals. The pilgrimage festivals are Pesah (celebration of Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost, celebration of the giving of Torah), and Sukkot (Tabernacles,

¹³⁶² Preceding Exod 31:14 is Moses’ ascent back up the mountain for forty days and nights. God gives instructions for the building of the tabernacle, ark, mercy seat, the appointment and ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests, the burnt offering, the construction of the altar, the financial support of the tabernacle, and other ritual accoutrements. God charges Bezalel and Oholiab to construct everything. From here, the biblical text discusses the Sabbath.

¹³⁶³ Read alongside the first midrash (D.1), both comments can be seen as addressing three potentially discrete appearances of the Sabbath commandment, the issue being that redundancy to a midrashic ear is peculiar, requiring explanation. The first midrash addresses the Sabbath commandment in Exod 20:8 and Deut 5:12 (its solution is that both were said at the same time; see the discussion in D.1), while our midrash addresses the Sabbath commandment in Exod 31:14 (its solution is that Exod 31:14 gives a separate instruction: one is to sanctify the entrance of the Sabbath). While D.1 appears to take זָכַר and שָׁמַר as distinct in meaning, our midrash seems to view them as synonyms, as both זָכַר in Exod 20:8 and ושמרתם in Exod 31:14 instruct that a blessing is required. The Sabbath commandment appears in other locations within Torah, as well: Exod 35:2; Lev 19:3, 30; 23:3; 26:2. While some appear clearly to be offering no more than further information about the Sabbath, others appear to introduce the commandment in the same form as Exod 20:8; Deut 5:12; and Exod 31:14. Admittedly, our midrash does not address these other occurrences.

commemoration of the wilderness wandering). In addition to these, Rosh Hashanah (celebration of the new year) and Yom Kippur (day of atonement) are the primary non-pilgrimage festivals.¹³⁶⁴ Our midrash asks how one knows the festivals also require a blessing over wine to sanctify them. For an answer to this, the midrash cites Lev 23:4.¹³⁶⁵ The full verse states, “These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them.” On first look, the verse does not seem to say anything about blessing festival days. However, in looking more closely, the Hebrew for the phrase “holy convocations” is *מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ*. The reason our midrash singles this verse out is because of the appearance of *קֹדֶשׁ* in relation to the festivals. Our midrash takes *קֹדֶשׁ* to mean a requirement to sanctify festival days with *Qiddush*, a blessing over wine.¹³⁶⁶

Our midrash does not specify what the sanctification of the Sabbath looks like, other than it involves a blessing over wine.¹³⁶⁷ The Mishnah states that when one blesses

¹³⁶⁴ Other later festivals include Purim (celebration of the redemption of the Jews from Haman, as recorded in Esther), Hanukkah (celebration of the Maccabean rededication of the Temple), and fast days, including four days dedicated to the memory of the events surrounding the destruction of the Temple (with *Tisha b'Av*, or ninth of Av, remembering the day the First and Second Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed). For more on holidays, see Tabory, “Jewish Festivals,” 556-572.

¹³⁶⁵ The section from Leviticus is sandwiched between a series of commandments concerning priests and sacrifices on one side, and a series of miscellaneous commandments on the other.

¹³⁶⁶ At the beginning of Leviticus 23, the text states, “These are the appointed festivals of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals” (v. 2). After this, the biblical text turns to the Sabbath: “Six days shall work be done; but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a Sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlement” (v. 3). The section then moves to the verse that is quoted in our midrash: “These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate at the time appointed for them” (v. 4). From here, the section discusses the calendar of festivals. The verse on the Sabbath (v. 3), from a modern critical perspective, may seem out of place. The repetition of language in v. 2 and 4 gives the impression the Sabbath verse was an insertion by a later redactor. From a rabbinic perspective, however, there appears an implicit, yet undeveloped, *gezerah shavah*. The Sabbath verse and the festival verses both use the term *מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ*, or “holy convocations” (the singular *מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ* is used in the Sabbath verse). This links the two verses together, allowing the Sabbath verse to apply to the festival verses. Torah itself only explicitly mentions Yom Kippur as a sabbath (see Lev 16:29-31). The implicit *gezerah shavah* extends that to all festivals.

¹³⁶⁷ The blessing is discussed in the Mishnah and Tosefta, but only in regard to the correct order. See footnote 1360.

over wine, one recites בורא פרי הגפן (“who created the fruit of the vine,” the “who” being God).¹³⁶⁸ This text would have been necessary, by virtue of the fact that *Qiddush* requires wine. Other than this, no other tannaitic text describes what is involved in the *Qiddush* blessing. What we do know is that wine typically accompanied meals, which means that the two blessings sanctifying the Sabbath likely occurred in conjunction with meals on the Sabbath. According to the Mishnah, there were three meals each Sabbath, as opposed to two on other days. The first meal was on the eve of the Sabbath, the second between the morning and afternoon prayer, and the third after it.¹³⁶⁹ The evening blessing established by Exod 31:14 would have occurred with a meal at the entrance of the Sabbath, while the daytime blessing established by Exod 20:10 would have occurred after the morning service, perhaps with the second meal. The Mishnah also states that blessings over wine and bread should occur before the meal¹³⁷⁰; then, after everyone has eaten, there is a blessing after the meal, known as the *birkat hamazon*.¹³⁷¹ In light of this, *Qiddush* would have been done with the blessing over the wine before the meal.¹³⁷²

7.5.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

As discussed above, the meaning of sanctification for Augustine is the cessation of sin. One sanctifies the Sabbath when one, with the help of the Holy Spirit, no longer sins. Since he defines “servile work” to mean “sin,” then true rest is the avoidance of

¹³⁶⁸ M. Berakhot 6:1. See also t. Berakhot 4:1-3.

¹³⁶⁹ M. Shabbat 16:2. See also *Mekhilta Vayassa* 5.

¹³⁷⁰ M. Berakhot 6:5.

¹³⁷¹ See m. Berakhot 7.

¹³⁷² For more on rabbinic understandings of the Sabbath, see Goldenberg, 37-41; and Robert Johnston, “The Rabbinic Sabbath,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth Strand (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 70-91.

sin.¹³⁷³ Evangelical interpretations of “sanctification” tend to be more literal. For Fretheim, the day is sanctified (i.e., set apart) when one rests. Sanctification can also include worship, but that is not the primary meaning of the commandment.¹³⁷⁴ Stuart also believes the Sabbath day is sanctified through rest, arguing that the NT affirms this was Jesus’ view of the commandment.¹³⁷⁵ He then goes on to state that the primary way in which one rests is through shifting one’s routine, so that the day truly is distinct from the other days. This does not mean one can do *anything* that is different. Rather, the day should be devoted to doing God’s will one day a week (e.g., “to worship, learn, study, care, and strengthen the spirit”).¹³⁷⁶ On the topic of worship, W. Janzen states that the day should revolve around a celebration of Christ’s resurrection and new creation.¹³⁷⁷ According to Ryken, one should be free to celebrate the work Christ has accomplished in any way one chooses. To create a series of regulations for the day would be to succumb to legalism.¹³⁷⁸

The *Mekhilta* includes a series of midrashim that argue for the sanctification of the Sabbath through a variety of means: rest (D.5), saving beautiful things for the day (D.3), adding time (D.2), manna, lights, and humanity’s face (D.12, which will be discussed in comparison to Christian interpretations below). To this list, our midrash adds a blessing over wine. The presence of wine and the act of blessing over it may signal to a Christian reader a similarity with communion/Eucharist. It is important to note that this is where the similarity ends. The most prominent difference is the purpose of the activity:

¹³⁷³ *Spir. et litt.* 15,27; s. 8.17; 179A.3.

¹³⁷⁴ Fretheim, 229; see also Enns, 418; Coggins, 80; Gilbert and Stallman, 51-52.

¹³⁷⁵ Stuart, 458-460. See Matt 12:1-12; Lk 13:10-16; Jn 7:22-23.

¹³⁷⁶ Stuart, 459-460.

¹³⁷⁷ W. Janzen, 282-283; Garrett, 477-488.

¹³⁷⁸ Ryken, 556-560.

for Christians, the act is associated with the sacrificial work of Christ and is incomplete without bread. For the rabbis, the activity is associated with the Sabbath, and is done over wine (unless there is no wine, in which case it is done over bread). In addition to this, even though it is impossible to analyze prayer texts of this ritual from the tannaitic era, as none have not been discovered, it is unlikely the act of blessing over wine had any sacramental significance akin to Christian understandings of the term.¹³⁷⁹ At most, the wine may have had associations with the celebratory nature of the occasion. The whole purpose of activity was to sanctify the Sabbath—to mark the day as distinct from all other days of the week, both at the beginning and during the day itself. This difference from communion/Eucharist may present a useful challenge for evangelicals. One may ask oneself what one does to mark the Sabbath (or whichever day one chooses) as distinct at the beginning of the day.¹³⁸⁰ One might first wonder if such a practice is even necessary. Perhaps not. Perhaps it might seem too legalistic. But if one wishes to dedicate the day to God as an act of worship, then observing its entrance in some way may prove beneficial, not unlike celebrating the moment the clock shifts to midnight on New Year's Day. Such an act may help one draw greater significance from the day, and help one mark its distinction from the other days of the week. As the *Mekhilta* shows, if one wishes, there is biblical support for such an act.¹³⁸¹

¹³⁷⁹ E.g., a channel of grace or an outward sign of an inward reality.

¹³⁸⁰ One might also ask what one does to mark the Sabbath day itself as distinct; however, for many denominations, the answer will likely be communion/Eucharist.

¹³⁸¹ Of course, the time in which the act is to be done must be considered. Setting the act at midnight would likely prove too impractical. The morning when one rises or the evening before might be suitable candidates.

7.6 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA D.5

Six Days Shalt Thou Labour and Do All Thy Work. But is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days? It simply means: Rest on the Sabbath as if all¹³⁸² your work were done. Another Interpretation: Rest even from the thought of labor. And it says: “If thou turn away thy foot because of the Sabbath,” etc. (Isa. 58.13) and then it says: “Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord,” etc. (ibid. v. 14).

Our midrash begins by pointing out that the meaning of כל (often translated as “all”) in the phrase מלאכתך כל ששת ימים תעבוד ועשית כל (Exod 20:9; underline mine) is not readily apparent. If it were taken in its plain sense, the commandment would be saying that one should do all of one’s work in the six days before the Sabbath, to which our midrash rightly asks, “is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days?” The answer, of course, is in the negative. So, then, what could the meaning of כל be? The direction the midrash takes to answer this question is that Exod 20:9 means that one should rest *as if* one had completed all of one’s work. Interestingly, the solution is not to understand the phrase מלאכתך כל ועשית in a different way, but to reapply it from the physical realm to the cognitive realm. The command, then, becomes a mental practice: to live on this one day of the week as if all of one’s work were completed.

What constitutes “work”? Our midrash does not specifically say. A text from the Mishnah¹³⁸³ lists thirty-nine actions:

אבות מלאכות ארבעים חסר אחת הזורע והחורש והקוצר והמעמר הדש והזורע הבורר הטוחן והמרקד והלש והאופה הגוזז את הצמר המלבנו והמנפצו והצובעו והטווה והמיסך והעושה שתי בתי גירין והאורג שני חוטין והפוצע ב' חוטין הקושר והמתיר והתופר שתי תפירות הקורע ע"מ לתפור שתי תפירות הצד צבי השוחטו והמפשיטו המולחו והמעבד את עורו והמוחק והמחתכו הכותב שתי אותיות והמוחק על מנת לכתוב שתי אותיות הבונה והסותר המכבה והמבעיר המכה בפטיש המוציא מרשות לרשות הרי אלו אבות מלאכות ארבעים חסר אחת

¹³⁸² In this sentence and the previous sentence, the printed editions lack כל (all), reading just מלאכתו (his work) instead. The כל follows the biblical text, but also adds emphasis.

¹³⁸³ M. Shabbat 7:2.

The main categories of labor are forty less one: sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sorting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking; shearing wool, washing it, beating it, dyeing it, spinning, weaving making two loops, weaving two threads, separating in order to sew two stitches; trapping a deer, slaughtering it, skinning it, salting it, curing its hide, scraping it, cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters; building, tearing down, putting out a fire, kindling a fire, striking with a hammer, taking anything from one domain into another. These are the main categories of labor, forty less one.¹³⁸⁴

According to Robert Goldenberg, the list can be broken down into categories of production: the first centers on food; the second on clothing; the third on writing; and the fourth on shelter. Together, the list comprises a tannaitic understanding of “the indispensable foundations of civilized life.” The items on the list also create the foundation upon which “one can be devoted to the higher activities” of the Sabbath, rather than the quotidian activities of building and maintaining a civilization.¹³⁸⁵

Our midrash offers another interpretation of Sabbath rest. Rather than simply acting like all of one’s work were completed, one should rest from even thinking about any work whatsoever. The Sabbath commandment is now taken to a new level. At the same time, this second interpretation exposes certain issues with the first. In the first interpretation, if one were to act as though all of one’s work were finished, one could still think about it, or plan other work that needs to be done, or perhaps even ponder a friend’s

¹³⁸⁴ Translation from Goldenberg, 34. Exceptions to these thirty-nine categories are noted throughout tannaitic literature. For example, in m. Pesahim 6:1, one is allowed to kill a lamb, prepare it, and burn the fat on the Sabbath for Pesah.

According to b. Shabbat 49b, 73b, 74b, 102b the list is deduced from the acts necessary to construct the tabernacle in Exodus 31 and 35. In both Exodus texts, the descriptions of the construction of the tabernacle are juxtaposed with commandments to observe the Sabbath. From this juxtaposition, it is inferred that these thirty-nine categories of work are prohibited on the Sabbath. However, Goldenberg finds the Talmud’s connection between the Exodus texts and the thirty-nine categories “artificial,” as the Talmud cannot definitively describe how the tabernacle was built and what items should be on the list. See Goldenberg, 34.

¹³⁸⁵ Goldenberg, 34-35.

work. The second interpretation reveals that if one does this, one is not resting. Thus, for one to truly rest, one must refrain from all thought of work whatsoever.

Our midrash then quotes two sections from Isa 58:13-14.¹³⁸⁶ The full text states:

¹³If you refrain from trampling the sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on my holy day; if you call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, serving your own interests, or pursuing your own affairs; ¹⁴then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

The midrash takes v. 13, trampling the Sabbath, and pits it against v. 14, taking delight in the Lord. According to the biblical text, trampling the Sabbath includes pursuing one's own interests, going one's own way, and pursuing one's own affairs. Our midrash interprets these to encompass not only actions but *thoughts*. To pursue one's own interests, to go one's own way includes not only what one does, but what one chooses to think about. However, as Isa 58:14 states, if one does engage the Sabbath properly, training both one's actions *and* thoughts on Sabbath-related matters (e.g., rest, Torah, company), the reward is that "you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob." In other words, our midrash, like Isaiah, states that the one who observes the Sabbath with one's whole self will experience great joy and bliss, perhaps on a level akin to the World to Come.¹³⁸⁷ Altogether then, Sabbath rest, according to our midrash, requires the rest of

¹³⁸⁶ These verses come from a larger section about true devotion to God: there is a certain hypocrisy or possible lack of knowledge within Israel. The people believe they can fast, and this will gain God's favor. God, however, states that fasting alone is not enough. The people must accompany that fasting with living justly, in peace with their neighbor, and helping the poor and oppressed. If the people do this, God will come to their aid, guiding them, healing them, rebuilding their ruins. At the end of this section comes the verses that our midrash quotes. If the people observe the Sabbath, then God will bring them joy.

¹³⁸⁷ I believe one can also detect a latent or subtle message in the quotations from Isaiah. Verse 14 speaks of the "heritage of your ancestor Jacob." Meanwhile, v. 12 states, "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations." One might see in these verses an eschatological dimension to the Sabbath. The midrash may be hinting that if one observes the Sabbath,

both mind and body; one cannot be fully achieved without the other.

7.6.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

Part of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, according to Augustine, is granting “quietness of heart” and “tranquility of mind,” which are the “product of a good conscience.”¹³⁸⁸ Those who experience these experience the true Sabbath. Those who do not are subject to “quarrels, spreading slanders, keener on argument than on truth,” letting “idle fancies fly around and sting you,” refusing to be still, demanding an understanding of God that does not require faith.¹³⁸⁹ Augustine’s interpretation has a certain symmetry with the *Mekhilta*’s. The latter argues against any thought of work, thereby banishing the possibility of anxiety or stress or distraction. The former promotes the search for truth, unity among people, and a sound conscience, which together beget a quietness of heart and tranquility of mind. Together, the *Mekhilta* and Augustine provide practical ways in which one might “take delight in the Lord” on the Sabbath. The difference between Augustine and the *Mekhilta* is that the former is centered on gaining “rest” through sound theology and cessation from sin, while the latter is focused on obtaining “rest” through the cessation of work (with body and mind). In addition, the former is after a permanent state of being, while what the latter argues for a practice that should occur one day a week. Augustine explicitly adds that there should not be one day a week in which one

resting from even the thought of work, this will lead to the messianic age, the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the resurrection of the dead. This is not nearly the message in b. Berakhot 57b that if Israel observes two Sabbaths in a row, the messiah will come, or that the Sabbath is 1/60th of the world to come. But it moves in these directions.

¹³⁸⁸ Augustine quotes Isa 66:2 and Ps 46:10.

¹³⁸⁹ S. 8.18. Translation is Hill’s. See footnote 579.

engages in physical rest. Augustine is well aware that humans naturally desire rest. His answer to this is that rest in this life is fleeting. God has promised to grant Christians an eternal rest, which they will have in full in the next life. Thus, Christians should work diligently in this life, so that they may experience the eternal rest God has promised. He states that this is the opposite of how many in this world think. They would seek rest in order to work, but in actuality, they should do good works in faith and hope of the eternal rest in the Kingdom.¹³⁹⁰

The *Mekhilta* could, I believe, agree with the logic of Augustine's argument, that one should work in order to rest, not vice versa. In the *Mekhilta*'s own language, the way in which one should count the days, organize the week, and prepare for the Sabbath is set up such that the culmination of one's workweek is the Sabbath rest. However, the *Mekhilta* exposes an important practical point, both in our midrash and also more strongly in D.11: even though one works toward the Kingdom or the World to Come in which eternal rest will be had, one still needs rest at regular intervals in *this* life.

Some of the evangelical commentators hold interpretations close to Augustine's. For example, Stuart argues that the purpose of the Sabbath is to become "spiritually stronger and closer to God." If doing this helps one recharge physically as well, that is an added benefit, not the primary purpose of the day.¹³⁹¹ A few, however, come close to the *Mekhilta*. Pokrifka, for example, argues that the purpose of the Sabbath is to address an obsession with work in the postlapsarian world, where the fear of not having enough drives people to work too hard and work others to death.¹³⁹² The Sabbath reminds people

¹³⁹⁰ *Ep.* 55:17-23; ; s. 9.3

¹³⁹¹ Stuart, 460.

¹³⁹² Pokrifka, 224-225.

to place their trust in God by resting one day a week. J. Janzen adds that working more than six days a week is an imitation of the pharaoh and creates an idol out of work.¹³⁹³ Fretheim takes this line of thought to a more extreme level, arguing that when God rested on the seventh day, God integrated rest into the rhythm of creation. When creation follows the Sabbath commandment, it is in “tune” with the *order* of creation. However, not following the Sabbath commandment introduces chaos.¹³⁹⁴

In considering what constitutes “work” in the Sabbath commandment, the evangelical commentators focus on physical labor. For example, Hamilton engages in a canonical approach to discern how the rest of the Bible defines work: getting food, venturing out of the home/community, farming, constructing the tabernacle, making a fire, wood gathering, selling merchandise, and moving objects.¹³⁹⁵ To this list, Garrett adds anything from “personal business,” to “official duties,” to a “craft or skill,” to any “work that one needs to take care of.”¹³⁹⁶ When juxtaposing these comments with Augustine and the *Mekhilta*, we find that they expose a dimension of the commandment that the evangelical commentators have not considered: that which occurs in the mind. Augustine shows that rest includes the tranquility of mind that derives from sound theology and cessation from sin; meanwhile, the *Mekhilta* indicates that one’s ability to actually rest requires not only physical inaction, but inaction in one’s mind, as well. Both Augustine and the *Mekhilta* work well together in challenging evangelical notions of rest.

¹³⁹³ J. Janzen, 148-149.

¹³⁹⁴ Fretheim, 230.

¹³⁹⁵ Hamilton, 338-339. See Exod 16:29-30; 34:21; 35:2-3; Num 15:32-36; Am 8:5; Jer 17:19-22; Matt 12:1-2; Mk 2:23-24; Jn 5:10.

¹³⁹⁶ Garrett, 477, n. 4. See Ps 107:23; Dan 8:27; Prov 24:27.

7.7 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.7

Thou nor Thy Son nor Thy Daughter. That is, the minors. Perhaps it is not so but means the grown ups? You must reason: Have they not already been forewarned themselves? Hence what must be the meaning of: “Thou nor thy son nor thy daughter”? The minors.

This midrash and the two that follow (D.8-9) appear to operate as one unit, employing together the method of כלל ופרט (*kelal u-ferat*, or a general statement which is limited by the particulars that follow) to Exod 20:10. In Exod 20:10, לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה (“you will not do all your work”) is the general statement. What comes after in Exod 20:10 are the particulars, or the items that the general statement encompasses¹³⁹⁷:

1. אַתָּה (“you”)
2. עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ (“your male or female slave”)
3. וּבְהֵמָתְךָ (“your livestock”)
4. וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ (“the alien resident in your towns”)

In what follows, I will divide my commentary of each midrash into individual sections, as I have done heretofore, but will save the comparison with Christian sources for the end of D.9, since the Christian commentaries, as a whole, deal with Exod 20:10 as a single unit.

The midrash in D.7 focuses explicitly on the second item in the list (וְבִנְךָ-וּבִתְּךָ, or “your son or your daughter”) and implicitly on the first (אַתָּה, or “you”). The late antique audience of our midrash might have expected “son” and “daughter” in the Sabbath commandment to refer to an *adult* son and daughter, as it does in the commandment to honor one’s parents.¹³⁹⁸ Such an expectation here, though, our midrash points out, would

¹³⁹⁷ In other words, the particulars are the referents of “you” in תַּעֲשֶׂה. The word תַּעֲשֶׂה is a second person singular imperfect of עָשָׂה, and is taken as a collective “you”; though, the midrash does not state this explicitly. The collective “you” is the general statement, which is then broken down in the particulars into five groups of people.

¹³⁹⁸ One can observe in the commandment on honoring parents, the *Mekhilta*’s comments assume that the commandment, by and large, is directed toward adult children. See *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 8.

lead to certain exegetical issues. Adult children are halakhically responsible for themselves¹³⁹⁹; thus, a Sabbath commandment that directs parents to assume responsibility for their adult children would not only be unnecessary, but unwarranted. In addition, if the second item (וּבְנֵי-וּבָתֵּר) were directed to adult children, there would be a redundancy in the biblical text. Our midrash does not state this explicitly, but all adults are included in the first item of the list of Exod 20:10, the אָתָּה (“you”). Thus, it would be redundant for the Sabbath commandment to name adults with אָתָּה and then adult children with וּבְנֵי-וּבָתֵּר.¹⁴⁰⁰ The only logical explanation, then, is that וּבְנֵי וּבָתֵּר must be in reference to minors. One might interpret the midrash to mean that minors are personally responsible for following the Sabbath commandment. However, more likely the midrash intends that though minors must observe the commandment, the parents are responsible for ensuring they do.

7.8 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.8

Nor Thy Man-Servant nor Thy Maid-Servant. That is, children of the Covenant. You interpret it to mean children of the Covenant. Perhaps it is not so but refers to the uncircumcised slave? When it says: “And the son of thy handmaid and the stranger may be refreshed” (Ex. 23.12) behold, the uncircumcised slave is there spoken of. Hence whom does Scripture mean when it says here: “Nor thy man-servant nor thy maid-servant”? Those who are children of the Covenant.

¹³⁹⁹ According to m. Avot 5:21, thirteen is stated as the age in which a boy becomes responsible for keeping the commandments, while in m. Sukkah 3:15, a minor who knows how to shake a *lulav* is now responsible for that commandment. Together, these texts indicate that children should be educated to undertake the commandments as they are ready, and that at a certain point (thirteen for boys, according to m. Avot 5:21), children become halakhically responsible for all of the commandments.

¹⁴⁰⁰ Our midrash, along with the two that follow (D.8-9), appear to be operating with the method of repetition (a repeated expression has a different meaning). See footnote 1317 for further explanation of the method.

Similar to D.7, the impetus for our midrash is a possible redundancy in the biblical text. On first look, Exod 20:10 and 23:12¹⁴⁰¹ seem to convey virtually the same commandment. In Exod 20:10, עֶבֶדְךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וְבִהְמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ (“your male servant or your female servant, or your domestic animals, or your resident alien”¹⁴⁰²) are commanded to rest, while in Exod 23:12, שׂוֹרְךָ וְחֹמְלְךָ וְיִנְכֶנֶשׁ בְּנוֹ-אִמָּתְךָ וְהַגֵּר (“your ox and your ass and the life of the son of your female servant and the resident alien”¹⁴⁰³) are given the commandment to rest. Since our midrash presupposes there are no redundancies in Scripture, it must seek an explanation.¹⁴⁰⁴

The midrash precludes the possibility of a redundancy in the biblical text by identifying two types of slaves: בני ברית (children of the covenant) and עבד ערל (uncircumcised servant).¹⁴⁰⁵ The first encompassed both those born Jewish and converts to Judaism, while the second were non-Jews.¹⁴⁰⁶ Our midrash states that Exod 20:10 commands the first to rest, while Exod 23:12 commands the second. How our midrash is able to make this interpretive move appears to derive from the repetition of גר in Exod 20:10 and 23:12.¹⁴⁰⁷ The גר in Exod 20:10 appears to be understood as the גר צדק (righteous convert to Judaism), while the גר in Exod 23:12 appears to be taken as the

¹⁴⁰¹ This verse is from the so-called “Book of the Covenant.” It appears toward the end of a section that revolves around the creation of a liturgical calendar.

¹⁴⁰² Translation is mine.

¹⁴⁰³ Translation is mine.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Operative here is the method of repetition (a repeated expression has a different meaning). See footnote 1317 for further explanation of the method.

¹⁴⁰⁵ See Adiel Schremer, “Thinking About Belonging in Early Rabbinic Literature: Proselytes, Apostates, and ‘Children of Israel,’” or: Does It Make Sense to Speak of Early Rabbinic Orthodoxy?,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 259-261 and n. 44. Schremer’s article deals with the phrase בני ישראל (children of Israel). As the *Mekhila* indicates in D.9 below, the tannaitic definition of בני ישראל also applies to בני ברית in our midrash.

¹⁴⁰⁶ On the equal status of slaves who are converts and slaves who are born Jewish, see *Mekhila Neziqin* 1.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Here, the interpretive move is only apparent. In D.9 below, it is explicit. Whether this midrash presumes the interpretation of D.9 is not fully clear, but seems possible.

גר תושב (resident alien; i.e., non-Jew).¹⁴⁰⁸ These differences signal that the servants and גר referenced in Exod 20:10 are Jews,¹⁴⁰⁹ while the servants and גר in Exod 23:12 are non-Jews.¹⁴¹⁰ While solving the possible redundancy between Exod 20:10 and 23:12, our midrash also determines the scope of Sabbath rest. If both verses were in reference only to Jewish slaves, this could potentially create an exception in which one's non-Jewish slaves could continue to do one's work on the Sabbath. The midrash, however, rejects this possibility, arguing that Exod 23:12 commands that the Sabbath also applies to non-Jewish slaves. The result is that *everyone* in one's house must rest on the Sabbath.

Our midrash's effort to determine the precise meaning of Exod 20:10 was not simply theoretical. Slavery was common in the economy of the entire Greco-Roman world. Jews kept both Jewish and gentile slaves, with different laws applying to the two categories. The most common ways Jews owned Jewish slaves were by purchase or by birth.¹⁴¹¹ A poor person and/or his children, either by choice or by force, could be sold

¹⁴⁰⁸ See pp. 454ff for further explanations of the גר תושב and גר צדק.

¹⁴⁰⁹ It might be that our midrash has *all* Jews in mind, regardless of whether they are slaves or free. Theologically, this would indicate that the children of the covenant are servants, which relates this midrash to the very first one (A.1). This is a possible outcome if our midrash is read independently of D.7 and 9. However, if our midrash takes D. 7 and 9 into account, adult Jews and their children have already been identified as subject to the Sabbath commandment. Thus, עֶבֶדָה וְאִמָּתָה in Exod 20:10 cannot refer to *all* Jews. Rather, it must solely mean slaves who are Jewish; and more specifically, Jewish-owned Jewish slaves. Moreover, The overall subject of our midrash is servants and the language of Exod 20:10 is possessive (“*your* male servant and *your* female servant”; emphasis mine). These reasons also suggest that our midrash has in mind servants who are also Jews.

¹⁴¹⁰ There is no direct mention of female slaves resting in Exod 23:12. Admittedly, our midrash does not address this. It seems to assume that both male and female slaves are intended.

¹⁴¹¹ For this section on slavery, I rely on Catherine Hezser's extensive examination of Jewish slaves. See Catherine Hezser, “Slaves and Slavery in Rabbinic and Roman Law,” in *Rabbinic Law in its Roman and Near Eastern Context*, ed. Catherine Hezser (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 133-176; Catherine Hezser, “Slavery: Rabbinic Literature,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Law*, vol. 2, ed. Brent A Strawn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 312-319. As one will notice, much of the rabbinic understandings of slavery are developed from biblical precedents, found especially in Exod 21:2-6; Lev 25:39-55; and Deut 15:12-18.

into slavery for a limited period, in order to pay off a debt.¹⁴¹² In addition, Jews captured in war and enslaved by another nation might be sold to Jews as slaves. A child born to a female slave, though, was automatically a slave.¹⁴¹³ Other sources of enslavement included placing thieves who stole property and could not repay the loss into slavery.¹⁴¹⁴ Among the tannaitic rabbis themselves, very few are recorded as owning slaves.¹⁴¹⁵

For halakhic purposes, Jewish slaves, in rabbinic understanding, were in some ways considered personal property of a male, akin to cattle, and were also considered similar to minors and wives in relation to the *בית בעל* (head of the house). Slaves had no personal rights, and were subject to their master's will.¹⁴¹⁶ Even freed slaves were placed at the bottom of the rabbinic hierarchy, with freeborn Jews at the top.¹⁴¹⁷ Bearing this in mind, it is possible that some Jews may have assumed that Jewish slaves were exempt from the Sabbath commandment.

Jewish slaves *did* have certain rights. A master who harmed a slave was obligated to pay damages for the injury.¹⁴¹⁸ A completely damaged eye or tooth led to a slave's freedom.¹⁴¹⁹ If a master killed a slave, he was punished.¹⁴²⁰ A master was obligated to

¹⁴¹² M. Qiddushin 1:1; m. Sotah 3:8; *Sifre Devarim* 26; *Sifra Behar* 5:7, 6:8. According to t. Arakhin 5:8, the one who sells oneself must be poor and in need of resources. In m. Qiddushin 1:2; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 3, the daughter must be a minor.

¹⁴¹³ M. Qiddushin 3:12; see also t. Qiddushin 4:16.

¹⁴¹⁴ *Mekhilta Neziqin* 1, 13.

¹⁴¹⁵ Some rabbis, such as Rabban Gamliel and his family, are recorded as owning slaves (m. Berakhot 2:7; t. Moed Qatan 2:16). Because slaves were expensive, only wealthy families tended to own them (t. Peah 4:10). One text appears to express a deep discomfort with Jewish slaves (t. Bava Kama 7:5): since God had freed Israel from Egypt, God alone should be Israel's master; it follows, then, that when one enters into slavery, one has adopted a mortal master, which is contrary to God's intent. At the very least, the rabbis were opposed to Jewish slaves being sold to non-Jews or places outside of Israel (m. Gittin 4:6; t. Avodah Zarah 3:16). Among the tasks that slaves would perform included conducting the master's business (t. Bava Kama 11:2), and selling their master's goods in the market (t. Bava Kama 11:7).

¹⁴¹⁶ M. Gittin 2:3; t. Gittin 2:4; t. Terumah 1:10; t. Makkot 4:1.

¹⁴¹⁷ M. Horayot 3:8.

¹⁴¹⁸ M. Bava Kama 8:3; t. Bava Kama 9:10. But one must hit the eye or tooth directly to be punished. See t. Bava Kama 9:26.

¹⁴¹⁹ T. Bava Kama 9:27.

¹⁴²⁰ T. Bava Kama 9:22.

treat his Jewish slave with dignity and respect.¹⁴²¹ A master was also obligated to provide for the needs of his slave and also the slave's family.¹⁴²² Jewish slaves could gain freedom through six years of service, the Jubilee Year,¹⁴²³ or payment.¹⁴²⁴ Alternatively, if a slave desired, he could remain with his master after his term ended, but only until the Jubilee Year or his master's death.¹⁴²⁵ Among these rights of slaves we can place our midrash, which ensures that Jewish slaves participate in the Sabbath rest, along with their fellow-Jews. Our midrash may also be communicating a theological point: the Sabbath is a reminder of creation, which inevitably leads to a reminder of the slave's creation in the image of God. As God rested, so too should a slave.

7.9 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.9

Nor Thy Stranger. Meaning the righteous proselyte. Perhaps it is not so but means the resident alien? When it says: "And the stranger" (Ex. 23.12), behold, it speaks there of the resident alien. Hence what does it mean by saying here: "Thy stranger"? The righteous proselyte.

Similar to D.7-8, the impetus for our midrash is a possible redundancy in the biblical text.

In both Exod 20:10 and 23:12, Israel is commanded to have the גר rest. In D.8 above, I stated that the midrash appeared to be identifying the גר in Exod 20:10 as the גר צדק

¹⁴²¹ *Sifra Behar* 5:7 and 6.

¹⁴²² *Sifra Behar* 5:7.

¹⁴²³ Perhaps more an ideal. See *Sifra Behar* 2:4-5.

¹⁴²⁴ M. Qiddushin 1:2; *Mekhilta* Neziqin 1-2; *Sifra Behar* 6:8. A slave girl could gain freedom through puberty (m. Qiddushin 1:2; see also t. Qiddushin 1:5). A master could also release a slave by oral declaration before death (t. Bava Batra 9:14), or by leaving the slave his inheritance (m. Peah 3:8; t. Peah 1:3).

¹⁴²⁵ *Mekhilta* Neziqin 2; *Sifre Devarim* 121; m. Qiddushin 1:2. According to the *Mekhilta* and *Sifre Devarim*, a slave could only extend his term if he and his master each had a wife and children, and if he loves his master and his master loves him due to the rewards generated by the slave's good work.

(righteous convert), and the גר in Exod 23:12 as the גר תושב (resident alien; i.e., non-Jew).

Here, in D.9, the connections are made explicit. With a distinction between the גר in Exod 20:10 and 23:12 now established, a possible redundancy is avoided. The question left for a modern reader is what exactly, according to the tannaitic rabbis, were the “righteous convert” and “resident alien”?

Where the Bible speaks only of the גר, not only our midrash, but tannaitic rabbinic literature in general differentiates between two types, the גר תושב (“resident alien”) and the גר צדק (“true/righteous convert”).¹⁴²⁶ A baraita ascribed to tannaitic origins in the Yerushalmi contains a debate about the status of the resident alien in contrast to a gentile¹⁴²⁷: a slave (עבד) can become a resident alien for life; a resident alien is a gentile in every way; one can host a resident alien for up to twelve months; a resident alien can be given meat forbidden to Jews from an animal that has died naturally and was not ritually slaughtered (נבילות)¹⁴²⁸; a resident alien must, according to some, accept all of the commandments of Torah, or according to others, only accept the commandment against idolatry; a resident alien can turn idols into non-idolatrous objects; a resident alien is to be treated like a Jew in three ways (he/she is not to be oppressed, not to be deceived, and exiled like a Jew¹⁴²⁹). Other tannaitic texts discuss various laws that apply to the resident

¹⁴²⁶ For references to גר צדק, see t. Arakhin 5:9; *Mekhilta Kaspā* 3; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 18; *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 8; *Sifre Devarim* 278; *Sifra Bahar* 5:6, 6:8; *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Shimon b. Yoḥai* 20:10.

For references to גר תושב, see m. Bava Metzia 5:6, 9:12; m. Makkot 2:3; m. Negaim 3:1; t. Makkot 2:7; t. Negaim 6:2; t. Arakhin 5:9; *Sifra Aḥare Mot* 7:12; *Sifra Qiddushim* 1:3; *Sifre Devarim* 104, 112, 181, 259, 278; *Mekhilta Kaspā* 3; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 12; *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 8; *Mekhilta Pisha* 15.

¹⁴²⁷ Y. Yevamot 8:1 [8d]. For a parallel text, see b. Avodah Zarah 64b-65a. See also George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 338-341.

¹⁴²⁸ See Deut 14:21 and also *Sifre Devarim* 104. My thanks to Heinrich Guggenheimer for identifying these texts. See Heinrich Guggenheimer, ed. and trans., *The Jerusalem Talmud: Third Order: Nashim, Tractate Yebamot* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), 324.

¹⁴²⁹ For these three ways, see Deut 24:14; 23:17; Num 35:15, respectively. My thanks again to Guggenheimer, 324, for identifying these texts.

alien: for example, a resident alien must be paid the same day he/she provided work; a resident alien must rest on the Sabbath (though, one source states that he/she must take the same kind of rest on the Sabbath that a Jew takes on a *יום טוב*, a festival)¹⁴³⁰; and a resident alien cannot eat the Passover sacrifice. These sources together indicate resident aliens were a sort of temporary resident, granted certain rights and privileges not granted to other gentiles.

The *גר צדק* (“true/righteous convert”) in tannaitic literature was a full convert to Judaism.¹⁴³¹ The literature indicates that converts are understood and treated in many ways like native-born Jews.¹⁴³² For example, converts are thought to have stood alongside Jews at Sinai to hear God’s revelation.¹⁴³³ They are called by the name Jacob (i.e., Israel).¹⁴³⁴ Converts are acceptable to God the same way Jews are.¹⁴³⁵ A convert is equal to a Jew with respect to every commandment in Torah.¹⁴³⁶ A convert remains a Jew even if he/she breaks one or more commandments.¹⁴³⁷ Converts are to be loved like any

¹⁴³⁰ This means he/she can prepare food on the Sabbath. See *Mekhilta Kaspā* 3.

¹⁴³¹ Notable appearances of the term *גר צדק* in tannaitic literature are contrasted with *גר תושב* or *יראי שמים* (“God fearers”), or is “called by the name of Jacob” (Isa 44:5).

¹⁴³² The extensive list of sources and analysis of converts is drawn from Gary G. Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 16-70. See also Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 156-174. Cohen provides an analysis of rabbinic, Second Temple, and non-rabbinic late antique sources on conversion in Judaism. Cohen also provides an analysis of the rabbinic conversion ceremony. See Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 198-238.

¹⁴³³ T. Sotah 7:5.

¹⁴³⁴ *Mekhilta Neziqin* 18.

¹⁴³⁵ *Sifre Bamidbar* 39, 109; *Mekhilta Pisha* 15. A convert must agree to follow both written and oral Torah (t. Demai 2:5; t. Sotah 5:4; *Sifra Qedoshim* 8:3); though, they are given some leniency in learning and following all of the commandments (t. Shabbat 8:5).

¹⁴³⁶ *Sifre Bamidbar* 39, 109; *Mekhilta Pisha* 15. Other sources are more specific about which commandments converts must follow. See m. Peah 4:6, 5:8; m. Zavim 2:1, 3; m. Negaim 7:1; t. Demai 6:2; see also t. Bikkurim 1:2; t. Nedarim 2:4; t. Niddah 1:3; *Sifra Vayikra Nedabah* 4:10, 11:2; *Sifra Qedoshim* 1:6, 3:4; *Sifra Behar* 5:1; *Sifra Aharei Mot* 9:7, 10:1, 12:1; *Sifra Vayikra* 2:3, 17:3; *Sifra Sav* 4:3, 9:1, 11:3; *Sifra Emor* 7:1, 19:7; *Sifra Hovah* 1:1; *Sifra Bahuqotai* 3:3; *Sifra Zavim* 1:1; *Sifra Masorah* 5:1; *Sifra Tazria* 1:1, 6:6; *Mekhilta Kaspā* 3; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 1; *Mekhilta Pisha* 15; *Sifre Devarim* 87, 110, 138, 149, 283-284, 299, 303; *Sifre Bamidbar* 71, 108, 111, 124.

¹⁴³⁷ T. Demai 6:13.

other Jew.¹⁴³⁸ However, other sources provide a more complicated picture of converts. For example, converts cannot be priests because the priesthood is hereditary.¹⁴³⁹ If the convert dies without having begotten a Jewish family, his/her property is rendered ownerless.¹⁴⁴⁰ Converts can be judges in noncapital cases, but only those born Jewish can try capital cases.¹⁴⁴¹

Together, these tannaitic texts on converts form a spectrum. At one end, as Gary Porton points out, some texts portrayed converts as a subclass of Israel, and that their status as Jews were at times ambiguous. One's lineage *did* matter in various crucial affairs.¹⁴⁴² However, at the other end of the spectrum were texts that portrayed converts as full members of Israel, even standing alongside the rest of Israel at Sinai. The reason for the tension, according to Shaye Cohen, is that Jewish identity contains both religious and ethnic components. A convert can fully accept Jewish beliefs and practices; nevertheless, a convert was born as a non-Jew, and thus does not have Jewish parents. Because various laws require a Jewish pedigree and purity of lineage, converts are automatically ranked below native-born Jews.¹⁴⁴³

¹⁴³⁸ *Sifra Qedoshim* 8:4; *Sifre Bamidbar* 78, 80; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 18.

For other sources, see m. Bekhorot 8:1; m. Hullin 10:4; m. Hallah 3:6; m. Bava Metzia 4:10; t. Hallah 1:12; t. Bava Metzia 3:25, 5:21; t. Bava Kama 8:1; t. Ketuvim 3:3; t. Sanhedrin 5:4; *Sifra Qedoshim* 4:1, 9:9; *Sifra Aharei Mot* 13:18; *Sifra Behar* 4:2; *Mekhilta Neziqin* 11; *Mekhilta Kaspa* 2.

¹⁴³⁹ *Sifra Aharei Mot* 12:11.

¹⁴⁴⁰ M. Bava Batra 8:1-2; m. Bava Kama 4:7, 9:11; *Sifre Bamidbar Naso* 2; t. Bava Kama 4:6; t. Bava Kama 10:16-17; *Sifre Bamidbar* 2, 4, 147. The rabbis work out various scenarios of what can be done with the property (m. Bava Batra 3, 4:9; m. Shekalim 7:6; m. Shevuot 10:9; t. Bava Batra 2:1, 11; t. Shekalim 3:11; t. Ketuvim 4:16).

¹⁴⁴¹ M. Sanhedrin 4:2; see *Sifra Vayikra* 4:2-3 and *Sifre Devarim* 291 for exceptions.

For other sources on converts, see m. Qiddushin 4:1; m. Bikkurim 1:4-5, m. Qiddushin 4:6-7; m. Bava Kama 5:4; m. Ketuvim 4:3; m. Yevamot 11:2; m. Horayot 3:8; t. Qiddushin 4:15-16; 5:1-3; t. Bava Kama 9:20; t. *Berakhot* 3:25, 5:14; t. *Menaḥot* 10:13, 17; t. *Rosh Hashanah* 2:5; t. *Megillah* 2:7; t. *Pesahim* 7:14, 8:4; t. *Yevamot* 2:5-6, 11:2, 12:2; t. *Horayot* 2:10; *Sifra Emor* 1:7; 2:9, 11:1, 15:9; *Sifra Aharei Mot* 7:9; *Sifre Devarim* 238, 289, 299; *Sifre Bamidbar* 7, 78, 119, 160.

¹⁴⁴² Porton, 28-31.

¹⁴⁴³ See Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 324-326. Cohen bases his analysis primarily in m. Bikkurim 1:4-5. See footnote 37 on p. 325 of Cohen's monograph for other mishnaic texts that Cohen uses to support his argument. See also pp. 327-336 for a rejection of the mishnaic view in the Yerushalmi, and

Our midrash is among these texts that portray converts as full members of Israel, arguing that the Sabbath commandment applies to a convert in the same way it does to a person born Jewish. In addition, by applying Exod 20:10 to the convert, our midrash implicitly links the motive clause of Exod 20:11 (and one might include Deut 5:15) to the convert, and not the resident alien. In this way, both the convert and person born Jewish are commanded to rest in imitation of God and also in memory of the exodus from Egypt; both, as well, are commanded to ensure that the resident alien also rests on the Sabbath.

7.9.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis for D.7-9

Augustine devotes no attention to the motive clause. This is not at all likely because he thought it was unimportant. Rather, as noted in chapter 3,¹⁴⁴⁴ Augustine typically focused on biblical texts that he believed were difficult to understand, skipping over those that were straightforward in meaning. It follows from this that Augustine most likely believed it was clear from the biblical text itself that the Sabbath rest—in its spiritual sense—should apply to everyone, no matter their status: *all* people were called to convert to Christianity, and with the aid of the Holy Spirit, cease from sinning.¹⁴⁴⁵ As for the evangelical commentators, the vast majority of the focus on Exod 20:10 is on its egalitarian message. Fretheim, for example, is careful to note that ethics is not a concern

debates about the status of converts in the medieval period. By the sixteenth century, the view represented in the Yerushalmi won out. In the *Shulḥan Arukh*, the most widely-accepted law code, converts can claim Abraham as their father, recite “God of our fathers” during blessings and prayers, and can lead prayers and Grace after Meals.

¹⁴⁴⁴ See footnote 539.

¹⁴⁴⁵ *Ep.* 55.17-23

in Exod 20:10. But when this text is read in light of Exod 23:12; 34:21; and Deut 5:14-15, it becomes clear that the Sabbath is an “egalitarian institution,” meant for every person and animal. Each time the Sabbath is observed, one is reminded of how one should treat others.¹⁴⁴⁶ Ryken adds to this that the Sabbath commandment is the first time in history that a people in the lower social order were given the same right to rest as people higher in the social order.¹⁴⁴⁷

The *Mekhilta* does not state explicitly that it finds in the Sabbath commandment an egalitarian institution. One can infer from its effort to include minors, Jewish and gentile slaves, resident aliens, and converts an egalitarian impulse. In some ways, the *Mekhilta* and Dozeman operate in the same way, merely following the course of the biblical text in Exod 20:10, commenting on family, slaves, and resident aliens, because the biblical text does.¹⁴⁴⁸ At the same time, the *Mekhilta* easily could have limited its purview of who was commanded to rest, but chose to expand the commandment to the very limits of what constituted Israel.

From a modern perspective, an egalitarian impulse may be detected in the *Mekhilta*’s concern for resident aliens. But at the same time, that egalitarian sense is disturbed by the *Mekhilta*’s acceptance of slavery. Notably, the concept of slavery receives very little attention among the evangelical commentators. Enns, for example, observes the reference to it in Exod 20:10, but adds nothing further than the fact that it may seem odd, though not impossible, that Israel had servants, even after having been released from slavery.¹⁴⁴⁹ One might argue that the *Mekhilta* is a product of its time.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Fretheim, 230.

¹⁴⁴⁷ Ryken, 550-554, 556.

¹⁴⁴⁸ Dozeman, 490.

¹⁴⁴⁹ Enns, 418, n. 19.

Slavery was prevalent in late antiquity. Even in Augustine's writings, slavery is accepted.¹⁴⁵⁰ One might say the same can be said of the Bible, that it is a product of its time—an era we should not repeat under any circumstance. The lack of attention to slavery among the evangelical commentaries may be taken as an indirect statement that it is no longer applicable.

Rejection of slavery for ethical and/or religious reasons today need not include a refusal to read or understand texts from the past that assume the existence of slavery. At the very least, study of such literature can fortify one's position. But there may also be rare occasions in which one might be challenged by what one finds. For example, for the rabbis, debt slavery was a way in which those who had fallen into financial ruin could recover. While not advocating the institution wholesale, one might still be afforded opportunities to compare rabbinic understandings of debt slavery with how financial instability is dealt with in one's own society. The rabbinic texts make clear that a Jew who went into debt slavery was treated with dignity and respect, that he/she was protected from harm, that his/her needs were taken care of, and that there was a set time in which the service ended. This person became integrated with another family, forming bonds that, at times, neither wished to separate at the end of the term. Again, one need

¹⁴⁵⁰ See Peter Garnsey, *The Idea of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 206-219. To Augustine, slavery was a "human right." Laws of slavery were the province of governments, which were in turn approved by God. Even so, Augustine argued that masters must treat their slaves well. See *civ.* 19.14.16. Slavery was a product of the fall, which God had not originally intended, but was now justified because of Original Sin. Only sinners can become slaves: it is part of God's punishment of humanity. Since everyone inherits Original Sin, everyone can potentially be a slave. See *civ.* 19.15. Nevertheless, Augustine believed that freeborn people within the Roman Empire should not become slaves, but that people outside the empire, regardless of status (e.g., the so-called "barbarians"), could become slaves within the empire. See *ep.* 199.12.46. Hezser points out that the most common ways people became slaves to Romans was through war or birth to a slave mother. There is also the less common possibility of selling oneself as a slave. Debt slavery was not allowed, according to Roman law, except the temporary sale of a child to pay off a debt. See Hezser, "Slaves and Slavery," 139-145.

not accept the institution of debt slavery—and yet, there may be aspects that can propel one to think about more compassionate and loving ways of dealing with people who have fallen into financial ruin in one’s own society.

Before moving on, it is worth discussing a comment made by Stuart in his interpretation of Exod 20:10. Stuart states that some have tried to limit the meaning of “alien within your gates.” He then notes a rabbinic interpretation limits it to converts. Stuart argues against this position, stating that it is incongruent with the intent of the commandment, which is to extend rest to everyone, not just Israelites.¹⁴⁵¹ Stuart follows the analysis of H. R. Cole, who argues that “traditionally” in rabbinic Judaism, the Sabbath rest is only extended to the גר צדק (righteous convert), not the גר תושב (resident alien). Among his evidence, Cole cites our midrash (D.9).¹⁴⁵² As should be clear from our study of D.9, the *Mekhilta* does not limit the Sabbath commandment only to the גר צדק. It extends the commandment to both the גר צדק *and* the גר תושב, and in the process, specifically rejects a potential caveat in which one could charge a resident alien (i.e., a gentile) to do one’s work on the Sabbath.

7.10 COMMENTARY ON *MEKHILTA* D.11

And Rested on the Seventh Day. And is He subject to such a thing as weariness? Has it not been said: “The Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isa. 40.28)? And it says: “He giveth power to the faint”¹⁴⁵³ (ibid. v. 29). And it also says: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made,” etc.¹⁴⁵⁴ (Ps. 33.6). How then can Scripture say:

¹⁴⁵¹ Stuart, 458-459.

¹⁴⁵² See Cole, 223.

¹⁴⁵³ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks וגוי (etc.).

¹⁴⁵⁴ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks וגוי (etc.).

“And rested on the seventh day”¹⁴⁵⁵? It is simply this: God allowed it to be written about Him that He created His world in six days and rested, as it were [כביכול], on the seventh. Now by the method of *qal vahomer* you must reason: If He, for whom there is no weariness [גייעה], allowed it to be written that He created His world in six days and rested on the seventh, how much more should man, of whom it is written: “But¹⁴⁵⁶ man is born unto trouble [לְעִמָּל]” (Job 5.7), rest on the seventh day.

Before diving into an explication of the midrash, a few points should be made about the underlined portion of Lauterbach’s translation above. The word for “as it were” is כביכול, which can also be translated as “it is as if” or “as though it were possible.”¹⁴⁵⁷ The word is generally employed by the rabbis when they use an anthropomorphism with which they are not entirely comfortable. Lauterbach translates גייעה as “weariness.” A better translation, I believe, would be “exhausting labor.”¹⁴⁵⁸ The AV’s translation of לְעִמָּל is “unto trouble.” In the context of our midrash, a more precise translation would be “to toil,” which conveys the sense of working to the point of exhaustion. Taking these changes into account, the text is better translated as:

God allowed it to be written about Him (as though it were possible) that He created His world in six days and rested on the seventh. If He, for whom there is no wearying labor, allowed it to be written that He created His world in six days and rested on the seventh, how much more should man, of whom it is written: ‘But man is born to toil’ (Job 5.7), rest on the seventh day” (underline mine).

The Sabbath commandment presents a serious theological challenge. If God—who is supposedly omnipotent—rested on the seventh day, does it then mean that God can grow tired and even need to rest? Our midrash rejects this by citing three verses in rapid

¹⁴⁵⁵ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks ביום השביעי (on the seventh day).

¹⁴⁵⁶ The Horowitz-Rabin edition lacks כי (But).

¹⁴⁵⁷ See Jastrow, 577.

¹⁴⁵⁸ See Jastrow, 562.

succession. The first is Isa 40:28,¹⁴⁵⁹ which states that God cannot grow weary or faint. The second is Isa 40:29, which states that God gives power to those who are faint. The third is Ps 33:6,¹⁴⁶⁰ which states that God made the world with a speech act. Together, the three verses offer a unified theology: during creation, God merely spoke and the world came into being. Since God exerted no energy, God required no rest.¹⁴⁶¹ Thus, God is incapable of growing faint, and moreover, God can revive those who *have* grown faint.

Having established this theological position, our midrash then asks why Scripture states that God rested on the seventh day. According to our midrash, if God does not require rest, then one can only conclude that God merely caused it to be written in Scripture about God's self that God rested on the seventh day. Why would God have Scripture state this? The reason can be found by using the method of קל וחמר (*qal vaḥomer*).¹⁴⁶² In the midrash's קל וחמר argument, God's lack of labor is the minor case.

¹⁴⁵⁹ The verse comes from a longer section that examines the disparity between God and creation: God's size is greater than creation (Isa 40:12); unlike humans, God needs no teacher (vv. 13-14); the nations are "less than nothing" in comparison to God (vv. 15-17); unlike idols, God was not created by human hands (vv. 18-20); God dwells above creation (vv. 21-24); God created the highest beings (vv. 25-26); God does not grow faint or weary, unlike humans, and will strengthen Israel so long as it waits on God (vv. 27-31).

¹⁴⁶⁰ The psalm praises God's creative acts and juxtaposes Israel with the nations. While the nations may have mighty armies and strength, God delivers those who fear and love God.

¹⁴⁶¹ See footnotes 1453-1454. By lacking וגר (etc.) and presenting other slight variations, the Horowitz-Rabin edition offers a more compact and rhetorically more potent midrash. Though the וגר isn't necessary, its presence encourages one to read the continuation of a passage. In Isaiah 40, vv. 27-31 address Israel directly. No one can escape faintness, not even the young. One might seek regeneration on one's own, but this will be to no permanent avail. In light of our midrash, those who "wait for the Lord" (i.e., those who observe the Sabbath), God will "renew their strength." There may even be an eschatological dimension to this: "they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" could mean that those who observe the Sabbath will experience the rest one will receive in the World to Come. Psalm 33 also takes on a particular meaning in light of our midrash. The redemption of Israel is now linked to Sabbath observance. Conventional wisdom would indicate that one grows in strength by building armies (see Ps 33:13-17). Israel's redemption, however, is found in fearing and loving God. Observing the Sabbath is one way to express this fear and love. Ironically, then, redemption is hastened not in building strength, but in resting.

¹⁴⁶² In this method, a law or rule that exists for a minor case can be applied to a major case of the same nature. The קל וחמר argument can only be applied to cases that do not involve punishments. See Yadin, *Scripture as Logos*, 83-86. As Yadin points out, קל וחמר is established in Scripture (e.g., Num 12:14-15).

Human toil is the major case. According to the logic of קל וחמר, if God does not labor—but had it written in Scripture that God rested on the seventh day—how much more should humans who toil need rest on the seventh day? Put another way, because God does not labor, God does not need to rest. God merely spoke and the world came into being (see Ps 33:6). In contrast, humans must labor to accomplish anything, and because they labor, they are subject to toil, and because they toil, they require rest.¹⁴⁶³ Thus, humans need the Sabbath. God, of course, does not. But God had it written in Scripture that God worked six days and rested on the Sabbath, in order to set a model for humanity. The phrase “and rested on the seventh day” is pedagogical: it is written in Scripture to teach humanity the significance of the Sabbath, that it is given in order to give humans necessary rest.

7.10.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

On the question of divine rest, there are remarkable similarities between the Christian commentators and the *Mekhilta*, but also notable differences. Like the *Mekhilta*, Augustine notes that God could not have tired from the act of creation, since God merely spoke. Even humans would not tire from doing this. The meaning of God’s rest is that he causes Christians to rest.¹⁴⁶⁴ Augustine then states in another place that God’s rest refers to God’s eternal existence, which is, in a sense, rest. According to Augustine, when Christians reach the kingdom, they will experience eternity, which for them will feel like

¹⁴⁶³ While humans עמל (labor), God can be seen as ברא (creating). The act of creation is God’s domain alone, and requires no labor, but only a voice.

¹⁴⁶⁴ S. 179A.3

rest without end.¹⁴⁶⁵ Then, in a third place, Augustine states that God works six days and rests on the seventh not because God was tired, but because God wished to demonstrate for humanity what life could be: if humans persevere in good works, they will experience God's eternal rest.¹⁴⁶⁶ The *Mekhilta* would agree with Augustine that God's eternal existence is, in a sense, rest, and would also agree that God sought to demonstrate how humans should act. However, for the *Mekhilta*, the "rest" that the Sabbath commandment instructs refers to actual, physical rest in this life. Thus, what God demonstrates is not simply the means by which to reach heaven. God shows humanity the necessity of rest in order to survive.

The *Mekhilta* also resolves a possible inconsistency in Augustine. Augustine argues in one place that God needed no rest after creation, because God merely spoke, but then states in another place that God demonstrated for humanity how to reach heaven by working six days and then resting. Understandably, as he wrote over a long career, inconsistencies in Augustine are to be expected, but one is still left wondering what to do with such inconsistencies. In our case, does God actually work or not? The *Mekhilta*'s argument provides a solution: indeed, God does not work, as God merely speaks and the world came into being. Rather, God *has it written* כביכול (as though it were possible) that God worked six days and rested on the seventh, in order to teach humanity the importance of the Sabbath. This is a solution Augustine would have likely been comfortable with. Commenting on the possibility of God being jealous in Exod 20:7, Augustine states that God is not actually jealous. Jealousy, for Augustine, is incompatible with God's immutability, as one of the central aspects of immutability is the inability of

¹⁴⁶⁵ S. 251.5

¹⁴⁶⁶ S. 9.6

anything to affect God. What the text is really trying to communicate is that God will not leave sin unpunished, and that the concept of jealousy can facilitate, though imperfectly, one's understanding of God in this way. The Holy Spirit uses words like "jealousy," which are unworthy of describing God, to signal to the reader that even words that seem most worthy, such as mercy, nonetheless still fall short of describing God. The ultimate purpose of human language is to lead one to "divine silence," an understanding of God that is beyond words.¹⁴⁶⁷

Our midrash would agree with Augustine on the claim that God is immutable. According to Cass Fisher, God's omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, and aseity (i.e., "independent existence") are standard theological positions in the *Mekhilta*. The *Mekhilta*'s commitment to these beliefs even results in exegetical efforts to explain biblical texts that might contradict them. Fisher notes our midrash as one example.¹⁴⁶⁸ One might also recall the *Mekhilta*'s efforts to explain God's alleged jealousy in B.8-9. However, one could argue that even if the *Mekhilta* possesses a standard theology, it preserves voices that are at variance with it. For example, one might recall A.2, in which Israel is successfully able to negotiate the terms of the covenant with God. If God were completely immutable, God would have presented a covenant that needed no negotiation, or would have denied Israel's request. Our midrash, however, stops short of Augustine's apophatic claim about the limits of human language. There *are* differences between human and divine language, as D.1 indicates; the latter is unambiguously superior. However, according to our midrash, human language is quite sufficient in describing God. It is precisely through human language that Scripture explains God's inability to

¹⁴⁶⁷ *C. Adim.* 7, 4; 11.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Fisher, 130-139.

tire, and it is through human language again that Scripture indicates the purpose of God's "resting" on the Sabbath. If there is any insufficiency, it is in the possibility of misunderstanding what Scripture means. This, however, is overcome by proper exegetical training.

Among the evangelical commentators, Stuart argues that God does not require rest, but still "took the Sabbath," to show humans they have no excuse to forego the Sabbath.¹⁴⁶⁹ Hamilton makes a similar point, citing Isa 48:20 to prove that God does not "grow tired or weary." God, however, rested anyway to show humanity that it requires rest.¹⁴⁷⁰ Hamilton adds that resting as God does is an act of *imitatio dei*.¹⁴⁷¹ Similar to Augustine, these interpretations come close to the *Mekhilta*, even citing the same text as the *Mekhilta*, Isa 48:20, to prove God does not need rest. However, both Augustine and the *Mekhilta* expose an issue in the theology of these interpretations. These interpretations presume that God can and does rest. As Augustine and the *Mekhilta* argue, God's immutability would actually preclude that possibility. The *Mekhilta* then goes on to argue, as stated above, that God had it written that God rested, in order to teach humanity the importance of rest. While the *Mekhilta*'s answer may not be fully satisfying, it possesses a theological consistency that surpasses the other commentaries.

7.11 COMMENTARY ON MEKHILTA D.12

Wherefore the Lord Blessed the Sabbath Day and Hallowed It. He blessed it with the manna and hallowed it by the manna.—These are the words of

¹⁴⁶⁹ Stuart, 460.

¹⁴⁷⁰ Hamilton, 337-340. Biblical quotation from Hamilton.

¹⁴⁷¹ Hamilton, 339.

R. Ishmael¹⁴⁷². R. Akiba says: He blessed it with the manna and hallowed it by prescribing a benediction for it. R. Isaac says: He blessed it with the manna and declared it holy by the verdict upon the wood-gatherer¹⁴⁷³ (Num. 15.35). R. Simon the son of Yoḥai says: He blessed it with the manna and hallowed it by the lights. R. Simon the son of Judah of Kefar Akko says in the name of R. Simon: He blessed it with the manna and hallowed it by the shining countenance of man's¹⁴⁷⁴ face¹⁴⁷⁵. In this sense it is said¹⁴⁷⁶: "Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it."

The meanings of this Exod 20:11's בָּרַךְ ("bless") and קִדְּשׁ ("sanctify") prompt this midrash. The Exodus text itself does not specify with what God blesses the Sabbath and how God sanctifies the day. This omission leaves it to the interpreter to determine an answer. In the *Mekhilta*, five rabbis make five different proposals¹⁴⁷⁷:

Rabbi	בָּרַךְ ("bless")	קִדְּשׁ ("sanctify")
R. Ishmael	מָן (manna)	מָן (manna)
R. Aqiva	מָן (manna)	בְּרָכָה (blessing)
R. Isaac	מָן (manna)	מְקוֹשֵׁשׁ (gatherer of sticks)
R. Simon b. Yoḥai	מָן (manna)	מְאֹר (lights/fire)
R. Simon b. Judah of Kefar Akko	מָן (manna)	מְאֹר פְּנֵי אָדָם (light of man's face)

In every interpretation, God blesses the Sabbath with manna that the Israelites ate after the exodus from Egypt, beginning in Exodus 16. There, God instructs the Israelites to gather the manna for six days and to collect a double portion on the sixth day (vv. 4-5, 22-26). The reason for the double portion on Friday is so that Israel can observe

¹⁴⁷² Instead of יִשְׁמָעֵאל (Ishmael), the Oxford Manuscript has יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Joshua).

¹⁴⁷³ Instead of בְּמִקְוֵי (by the verdict upon the wood-gatherer), *Efat Zedek* has בְּמִלְאָכָה (with the work). Meanwhile, *Sefer Vehizhir* has בְּקִדְּשׁוֹ (with his holiness).

¹⁴⁷⁴ After אָדָם (man), the Munich Manuscript and the printed editions add הָרִאשׁוֹן (the first), rendering the sentence, "by the shining countenance of the first man's face). Underline mine.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Instead of פְּנֵי (face), *Sefer Vehizhir* has עֵינָיו (eyes).

¹⁴⁷⁶ Lauterbach chose לֵכָךְ נֵאמַר (in this sense it is said), following *Efat Zedek*.

¹⁴⁷⁷ See *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:2 for a parallel text.

the Sabbath on the seventh day and still have something to eat. In stating that God blessed the Sabbath with manna, our midrash underscores the divine origin of the bread, that it comes as a gift from heaven to sustain Israel, and also that the blessing requires human participation: Israel must collect the manna; God guarantees, though, that it will not be ruined.¹⁴⁷⁸

Each rabbi offers a different explanation of how God sanctifies the Sabbath from every other day. For R. Ishmael, God not only blessed the Sabbath with manna, but also sanctified it with manna. The Sabbath was sanctified (i.e., made distinct) because no manna fell on this day; it is present because it was gathered the day before, on the sixth day.¹⁴⁷⁹ For R. Aqiva,¹⁴⁸⁰ the Sabbath is sanctified by a ברכה (“blessing”). No further information is provided about the blessing, but there is a potential connection between R. Aqiva’s comment and the blessing over wine in D.4 above; although, that blessing is a humanly performed ritual. For R. Isaac, God sanctified the Sabbath with the incident of the מקושש (“wood gatherer”). This refers to Num 15:32-36, in which a man who gathered wood on the Sabbath was consequently executed for working on that day.¹⁴⁸¹ Admittedly, R. Isaac’s interpretation may seem odd to a modern reader, as his comment could be taken to mean that the Sabbath is sanctified by the execution of a violator. If we keep in mind that the word “sanctification” (קדש) conveys the sense of setting apart, we

¹⁴⁷⁸ The manna itself continues to arrive for the forty years Israel is in the desert (Exod 16:35; Josh 5:12). Moses tells Aaron in Exod 16:32-33 to store an omer of manna in a jar and to place it before God as a memory for future generations. Clearly the intention is so that the significance of the manna will not be forgotten. Our present midrash’s concern leads it to highlight the manna’s relation to the Sabbath and redemption.

¹⁴⁷⁹ A double portion fell on the sixth day. The first portion was for the sixth day, while the second was for the Sabbath. Narratively, this would have occurred in the wilderness with Israel in Exodus 16.

¹⁴⁸⁰ R. Nathan is the tradent in *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:2.

¹⁴⁸¹ On one particular day in the wilderness, some Israelites find a man gathering wood on the Sabbath. They bring him to Moses, Aaron, and the congregation. God tells Moses to put the man to death by stoning him outside the camp. The congregation does as God commands.

understand that what R. Isaac means is that God showed the degree to which the Sabbath is set apart from every other day of the week through his enforcing the prohibition on work. The wood gatherer violated this prohibition by gathering wood, and in all likelihood, the wood gatherer would have violated the commandment to not make a fire, as well.¹⁴⁸² The primary point is not that execution brings sanctification, but that sanctification is brought by rest, and is only maintained through the protection of that rest.¹⁴⁸³ For R. Simon b. Yoḥai, the Sabbath is sanctified by מאור (“fire”). What he seems to mean by this is that fires may not be lit on the Sabbath.¹⁴⁸⁴ Thus, one sets the Sabbath apart from the other days of the week by not lighting a fire. Literarily, R. Simon b. Yoḥai’s interpretation leads nicely to R. Simon b. Judah of Kefar Akko’s, which is that God sanctifies the Sabbath with the light of the face of אדם (humanity).¹⁴⁸⁵ What appears to sanctify the day for R. Simon is the rest and joy that shines from the face of the person who observes the Sabbath.

Taken together, the picture we are given from the five rabbis is that God initially blessed the Sabbath with manna, which enabled the Israelites to fully rest, having no need to acquire sustenance to make it through the Sabbath, and God sanctified the day with manna, a blessing, cessation of work, and the shining face of humanity. The overall message of our midrash is that what makes the Sabbath distinct now and forever are these elements.

¹⁴⁸² See m. Shabbat 7:2 and p. 443 above.

¹⁴⁸³ In *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:2, after this interpretation comes another, which states that God sanctifies the day with a change of clothing.

¹⁴⁸⁴ See m. Shabbat 7:2. In *Bereshit Rabbah* 11:2, R. Liezer references the practice of lighting a fire on the eve of Sabbath, which can then be benefited from on the Sabbath.

¹⁴⁸⁵ The word אדם could also be in reference to Adam. See the Munich Manuscript in footnote 1474.

7.11.1 Comparison with Augustinian and Evangelical Exegesis

The Christian interpretations of the sanctification of the Sabbath are discussed in the comparison section of D.4. To recap briefly, sanctification is understood as the cessation of sin (Augustine); rest (Fretheim); shift in routine, and devotion to worship, learning, studying, caring, and strengthening the spirit (Stuart); and celebration of Christ's redeeming work (W. Janzen and Ryken). The five interpretations by the rabbis have resonances with all of these, and extend the possibilities further. The topic of sin appears in R. Isaac's reference to the wood gatherer. Execution of a violator of the commandment would simply be untenable today for a variety of reasons, both in evangelical and Jewish circles,¹⁴⁸⁶ but R. Isaac's comment raises the problem of maintaining boundaries, and solicits a useful question of what consequences should be in place if an individual were not to follow what the individual (or the community) had set out as proper Sabbath observance. The willingness to set protections and consequences for oneself may be indicative of how important the Sabbath is in one's life.

A shift in routine can be considered in relation to R. Simon b. Yoḥai's comment about fire/light and R. Ishmael's comment about manna. Today, observance of the Sabbath among various Jewish communities involves a gamut of practices, including restrictions on cooking food during the Sabbath.¹⁴⁸⁷ In mentioning this, I am not advocating imitation of Jewish practices. Indeed, some may see that as a form of cultural appropriation. Rather, I believe the tannaitic (and contemporary) practices can be useful

¹⁴⁸⁶ For more on rabbinic and modern views of capital punishment, see Elie Spitz, "The Jewish Tradition and Capital Punishment," in *Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader*, eds. Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 344-349.

¹⁴⁸⁷ For more on contemporary Jewish applications of the Sabbath prohibition on work, see Blu Greenberg, *How To Run a Traditional Jewish Household* (Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 1989), 30-57.

in thinking about what is conducive toward breaking one's routine, so that more focus can be placed on worship, learning, studying, caring, and strengthening the spirit. As an example, part of R. Simon and R. Ishmael's concern is ensuring the Sabbath is spent on Sabbath matters, not food preparation. In light of this, breaking one's routine might include consuming food that is easier to prepare or prepared in advance. This would allow one more time to devote to other affairs.

The topic of celebration of God relates to R. Aqiva's comment about reciting a blessing on the Sabbath. This subject is treated in the comparison section of D.4 above. Finally, the topic of rest relates to R. Simon b. Judah of Kefar Akko's comment about the shining light of a person's face. R. Simon's comment shifts the focus from the act of rest to the effect it has on a person. By doing this, a person's face—and by implication, one could include the entire body—is what sanctifies the Sabbath. The holiness of the day, and the degree to which it is holy, is achieved by how much rest one experiences. R. Simon's comment not only underscores the importance of rest, but uplifts the dignity of humanity as reflected in the human face, and the way in which one's face can illuminate the rest of the world.

7.12 CONCLUSION FOR FOURTH WORD

In his commentary on the Sabbath commandment, W. Janzen rightly observes that the commandment is a point of controversy in Christianity. Some believe it has been

rendered null with the coming of Christ,¹⁴⁸⁸ some argue it is still incumbent on Christians (e.g., Seventh Day Adventists), while others hold that Christians should observe the Lord's Day, on which the church celebrates the resurrection and new creation that Christ has initiated. The origins of the Lord's Day can perhaps be traced to the NT (see Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). Whether or not it originated in the NT, its popularity spread with Constantine, who prohibited certain kinds of work on Sunday,¹⁴⁸⁹ and also with Augustine, who spiritualized the Sabbath.¹⁴⁹⁰ In Augustine's view, the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath is the cessation of sin that Christians experience when they undergo conversion. Conversion is made possible by Christ's resurrection on the eighth day—the Lord's Day—a day that should thenceforth be celebrated by Christians on its own, apart from the Sabbath. The Sabbath, for Augustine, is a sacrament¹⁴⁹¹ that points to the eighth day, on which happiness and rest will have no end.¹⁴⁹²

Today, how the Lord's Day is practiced depends on who one asks. The degree and character of “rest” during the day is a matter of debate. There is perhaps more agreement that the day should involve worship, which includes a communal gathering and usually communion/Eucharist, though not all denominations do the latter, at least not every week. In my own (self-described) nondenominational tradition, Sunday involves rest, pleasurable activities, and a communal gathering that includes Scripture reading, songs, preaching, and communion once a month. None of these are believed to be requirements, but are encouraged, so long as they facilitate one's relationship with God. As Ryken

¹⁴⁸⁸ E.g., Wendland, 124.

¹⁴⁸⁹ See footnote 674.

¹⁴⁹⁰ W. Janzen, 282-283.

¹⁴⁹¹ See footnote 555 for Augustine's meaning of “sacrament.”

¹⁴⁹² *Ep.* 55.17-23

expresses in his commentary, there is a concern that any regulations surrounding the Sabbath will lead to legalism.¹⁴⁹³

Which day one chooses as one's Sabbath/Lord's Day, and the degree to which practices are standardized or required, varies widely across Christian denominations. However one approaches the Sabbath, I believe much can be gained from placing one's practices into dialogue with the *Mekhilta*. In doing this, I am not suggesting that one should adopt Saturday as one's Sabbath, and strictly follow all of the prescriptions of the *Mekhilta*, though some may feel convicted to do either. I myself believe that the Sabbath should remain distinct from the Lord's Day, and that the weight of history and theological difference between each day precludes any hybridization.¹⁴⁹⁴ Rather, I believe that consideration of the *Mekhilta*'s practices surrounding the Sabbath can help an evangelical gain a new appreciation of the Lord's Day/Sabbath or even refine or adopt new practices, which can then facilitate the vigor and depth of one's engagement with the day.

As the *Mekhilta* states, one might consider how one might both remember and observe the day simultaneously (D.1), increase its significance and distinction by adding time to the day (D.2), increase its anticipation with how one organizes the rest of one's week (D.3), welcome its beginning with some sort of blessing/practice (D.4), cease from labor in both mind and body (D.5), protect the sanctity of the day (D.6), extend its egalitarian nature to all members of society (D.7-9), ponder the Sabbath commandment's

¹⁴⁹³ Ryken, 556-560.

¹⁴⁹⁴ At the most basic level, the Sabbath draws its significance from the seven-day creation story and the exodus from Egypt. In addition, it is the sign of the covenant between God and Israel at Sinai. Meanwhile, the Lord's Day revolves around the death and resurrection of Christ and the new creation that Christ has begun. The meaning and origin of the Lord's Day is, of course, derived from the Sabbath, but the significance of the Sabbath is filtered through the salvific work of Christ.

theology of creation (D.10), discern the theological implications of the day from its motive clause (D.11), and mark the day as holy (i.e., distinct) from all other days (D.12).

Through all of these, what the *Mekhilta* reveals is that the holiness of the day can take a variety of forms, including the relaxation of the mind from the thought of labor, the presence of beautiful things, and even the radiant look on one's face. The *Mekhilta* also reveals that while God makes the day holy, so do people. Virtually all of the *Mekhilta*'s midrashim argue for ways in which people might increase the anticipation or joy of the day, or mark it as distinct from all other days. Holiness is a collaborative effort. And for humans, holiness is contingent on their participation—both the degree *and* the ways in which they choose to participate. Human effort makes a difference. One might even say, in the words of Fretheim, human effort has a cosmic significance.

8.0 CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

I began this dissertation recounting my first attempts to read and understand the legal material of the Hebrew Bible, how I found no relevance in the Law for a life redeemed by grace, how my attempts dissipated my excitement for the Bible, my stamina, and even my ability to remain awake. In this project, I have sought a more robust and enduring motivation to engage the legal material. That led me to the rabbinic disposition of *Torah lishmah* and an endeavor to discern its applicability and significance through an exploration of the Decalogue, with the aid of the *Mekhilta* and its interactions with Augustine and evangelical commentaries. Having attempted *Torah lishmah* for five years now, at the end of this process, I can confidently say that my relationship with the legal material has undergone a dramatic transformation. I now approach it as an essential part of my life. In this conclusion, I will reflect on the ways in which my attempts at *Torah lishmah* have shaped me over the last five years. In addition, I will reflect on what I believe my project has contributed to the field of comparative theology, and what I believe the next steps after this project should be.

8.1 REFLECTIONS ON *TORAH LISHMAH*

Before delving into a reflection on *Torah lishmah*, let me first say that I went into this project not fully knowing what to expect. I believed my hypothesis about *Torah lishmah* being a useful disposition for an evangelical would hold true, but I did not know

the exact ways it would affect my study of the legal material of the Hebrew Bible. I spent five years attempting *Torah lishmah*. While the reflections below may give the impression that my endeavor was a continuous crescendo of success, it was anything but that. My realizations and ability to sustain the effort developed slowly. At many points, I found myself frustrated, discouraged, and even bored. These feelings still remain—though they have diminished greatly over the years. Their enduring presence has taught me that they will be part of the ongoing process. What I found over time, and what I will now articulate, is that the study of the legal material through *Torah lishmah* became for me a new form of worship, a new form of divine communion and refinement, and something that I came to embrace. I will discuss each of these in successive order.

John Witvleit defines evangelical worship as “a profoundly relational act which an individual or community conveys reverence and adoration to God.”¹⁴⁹⁵ Worship, then, is an action that contains two elements: union and devotion. Perhaps the most common forms of worship in evangelicalism include praise songs, prayer, sermon, communion, service to others, and Bible study. In my own experience, the pinnacle of evangelical worship is praise songs. This is what I was educated to believe in my formative years as an evangelical, and it is a belief that I know is not unique to me. Indeed, as Mark Galli, the well-known former editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today* remarked recently, “Many evangelicals have gotten into the terrible theological habit of calling only the first part of our services ‘worship,’ that first part in which we sing praises to God in three or four songs. We say things like, ‘Before we listen to the sermon, let’s spend some time in

¹⁴⁹⁵ John Witvleit, “Worship,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Daniel Treier and Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1732-1737.

worship.’ As if the singing is about God and the sermon is not about God.”¹⁴⁹⁶ What makes praise songs the pinnacle is directly linked to evangelical eschatology and desire. As Galli writes, “From Paul’s vision of every knee bowing and every tongue confessing Jesus as Lord (Phil. 2) to John’s vision of the 24 elders glorying God (Rev. 4) and many places between, we see worship as the great and wondrous activity in the kingdom of heaven.” When evangelicals read these biblical texts, there is a tendency to visualize their eternal glorification of God in the form of song. Thus, it follows that to worship God with song in *this* life is to encounter perfection, to touch eternity, to experience the new heaven and the new earth. At its best, singing praise songs is an act of acknowledging God’s transcendence that leads to a moment of intimate, ecstatic union with God.

In some ways, evangelicals consider the other forms of worship—prayer, sermon, communion, service to others, and Bible study—as lesser forms of worship or foundational practices that lead to it. Bible study, in my experience, was not consistently understood as worship. My community and I often treated it as the mechanism that guides one *toward* a life of worship. When it *was* considered worship, it was the encounter with the words of God—the act of reading and listening—or the time of prayer afterword, in which one asks that the lessons one has learned be incorporated into one’s life, that were viewed as “worshipful.” But even in the most worshipful moments of Bible study, the union with God that was experienced never reached the full potency that is encountered in praise songs. It is perhaps for this reason—the unparalleled ecstatic union with God—that praise songs were seen as a higher form of worship. Furthermore, the

¹⁴⁹⁶ Mark Galli, “The Temptations of Evangelical Worship,” *Christianity Today*, July 3, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/july-web-only/temptations-of-evangelical-worship.html> (accessed July 24, 2019).

more academic the study of the Bible became, the less worship-oriented it was considered to be. In fact, when I entered college and began studying the Bible academically, I developed, along with my colleagues, the belief that academic study of the Bible was separate from a devotional engagement. The former was work, a search for objective meaning, performed in order to pass a class; the latter was a divine encounter, a search for personal meaning, performed in order to surrender oneself and gain intimacy with God.

The dichotomy between academic and devotional engagement with the Bible remained with me for many years; that is, until I encountered *Torah lishmah*. After attempting *Torah lishmah* for some time, I began to notice the separation between the two disappear. They were becoming one and the same, but not such that Torah study remained a lesser form of worship to praise songs. Rather, Torah study was now becoming a form of worship analogous to praise songs—in aspects of both union and devotion.

The unifying experience of Torah study is discussed in a rabbinic text on the manifestation of God's presence in the life of the community and individuals:

Rabbi Ḥalafta of Kefar Ḥananyah said, “When ten sit and occupy themselves with Torah, the *Shekhinah* dwells between them, as it has been said: ‘God stands in the divine assembly’ (Ps 82:1). And whence is it proved for even five? As it is said, ‘He founded his band upon the earth’ (Am 9:6). And whence is it proved for even three? As it is said, ‘He judges in the midst of judges’ (Ps 82:1). And whence is it proved for even two? As it is written, ‘Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard’ (Mal 3:16). And whence is it proved for even one? As it is said, ‘In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you’ (Ex 20:24).”¹⁴⁹⁷

¹⁴⁹⁷ M. Avot 3:6. Translation from Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *More Torah*, 158. See also *Mekhilta Amaleq* 4, *Mekhilta Bahodesh* 11; m. Avot 3:2; b. Berakhot 64a; b. Moed Qatan 29a.

According to this text, when groups or individuals study Torah, they receive the *Shekhinah*, God's indwelling presence.¹⁴⁹⁸ The presence of the *Shekhinah*, as Max Kadushin argues, is not something that is perceived by the five senses.¹⁴⁹⁹ Rather, the *Shekhinah* is experienced through cognition and emotion. Through the act of Torah study itself and through one's own active acknowledgement, one knows the *Shekhinah* is present, and feels the *Shekhinah*'s warmth and intimacy.¹⁵⁰⁰

In my own effort at *Torah lishmah*, I began to experience a connection to God that I had not encountered heretofore. It has elements that are similar to the intimacy with God I experience while singing praise songs, but it is distinct from it. I find words rather inadequate in attempting an explanation. Perhaps the best I can offer is a simile. Praise worship is akin to a connection wrought from a deeply meaningful conversation or gaze with another—an I-Thou encounter, in the words of Martin Buber.¹⁵⁰¹ Meanwhile, *Torah lishmah* is akin to the bond a child develops with a parent when one has sustained an arduous project with or for that parent, a project that one knows brings the parent delight.

¹⁴⁹⁸ See Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*, 2nd ed. (New York: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1965), 223-226; and Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 43-44, 47-50, 63-65. The *Shekhinah* is neither a hypostasis nor a separate entity from God, but a term for God's presence. This presence can be found in specific locations. See *Pesiqta d'Rav Kahana* Pisqa 2:10; *Vayikra Rabbah* 29:4; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:8), and can be in multiple locations simultaneously, and is indeed everywhere (see b. Bava Batra 25a; b. Sanhedrin 39a). Contrary to what some have argued, the term has no connection to "Wisdom" from the Second Temple Period, nor is it referred to with any appellations, as Wisdom is, such as Bride, Queen, or Princess. Urbach speculates that the term *Shekhinah* was not a rabbinic invention, but was drawn from the Second Temple period and given more emphasis and development by the rabbis to argue for the presence of God in the absence of the Second Temple, which had been the primary location of God's presence on earth.

¹⁴⁹⁹ The presence of *Shekhinah*, according to Kadushin, is an experience of "normal mysticism." One encounters the *Shekhinah*, not through esoteric acts or special sensory abilities or powers, but in ordinary religious actions, such as prayer, repentance, or Torah study; it is in the discipline of maintaining these actions that activates the encounter. See Kadushin, *Rabbinic Mind*, 252-259.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Kadushin states that conscious knowledge of the *Shekhinah*'s presence is ultimately beyond concrete description, and actual descriptions of encounters with the *Shekhinah* are not explicit in rabbinic literature. However, he believes that from the language the rabbis use when referring to the *Shekhinah*, he is able to extrapolate a description. See Kadushin, *Rabbinic Mind*, 265-272.

¹⁵⁰¹ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone, 1996).

Torah lishmah became an act of worship for me precisely because of this reason. The experience of divine union was different in character to praise songs, but no less intense or meaningful. Whether this could be called an encounter with the *Shekhinah* would require careful thought and consideration. On the one hand, my practice may fit the requisite parameters for the manifestation of the *Shekhinah*. On the other hand, to say I had experienced the *Shekhinah* may be a step too close to religious hegemony or hybridization.¹⁵⁰² David Sandmel describes various concerns regarding this sort of activity from a Jewish perspective. While some Jews would welcome Christian appropriations of Jewish beliefs and practices, others “react negatively to what is perceived to be yet another example of two thousand years of Christian disregard for the sanctity of the Jewish tradition and Jewish sensibilities.” Sandmel observes that some Christians tend to act from a supersessionist stance, believing that “since Christianity has replaced the Jews as God’s covenant partners, Jewish tradition itself can be mined for Christian purposes without concern about the reactions of Jews.”¹⁵⁰³ While appropriating the *Shekhinah* for Christian purposes would not come from a supersessionist motivation in this dissertation, it certainly would disregard the sanctity of Jewish tradition if there were no concern about Jewish reactions. Moreover, the exact relation between the *Shekhinah* and the Trinity, especially the Holy Spirit, would require careful consideration before any attempt at appropriation. Even though some work has been done on this

¹⁵⁰² Catherine Cornille points to the problem, raised by Hugh Nicholson, of religious hegemony in comparative theology, the “instrumentalization or domestication of the other religion for one’s own religious purposes.” See Cornille, 104. See also Hugh Nicholson *Comparative Theology and the Problem of Religious Rivalry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29-105. On religious hybridity and comparative theology, see Cornille, 26-28, 152-153.

¹⁵⁰³ David Fox Sandmel, “Philosemitism and ‘Judaizing’ in the Contemporary Church,” in *Transforming Relations: Essays on Jews and Christians Throughout History in Honor of Michael A. Signer*, ed. Franklin Harkins (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 417.

matter,¹⁵⁰⁴ further study and actual dialogue between Jews and Christians would provide much needed insight. Suffice it to say at this time that what I experienced, I believe, was a divine encounter on par with praise songs.

Torah lishmah also became an act of worship because of the way in which it required devotion of my whole self to God. I found myself spending long hours at a time, channeling all of my intellectual faculties to discern the meaning of the biblical text, its reception in the *Mekhilta*, and the ways in which those interpretations interacted with the exegeses of Augustine and evangelical commentaries. Not only did the endeavor claim my full intellectual capacity, but also my evangelical identity. It required a deep awareness of who I was and what I believed and a willingness to reconsider those

¹⁵⁰⁴ Frequently, in Christian understanding, the presence of God with individuals or groups is thought to be the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. According to rabbinic literature, the Holy Spirit's activity ended with the last of the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. See t. Sotah 13:3; b. Sanhedrin 11a. Is it possible, however, that the divine presence experienced by a Christian and a Jew is the same, and is called the Holy Spirit by the former and the *Shekhinah* by the latter? For more on this topic, see Noah Hacham, "Where Does the Shekhinah Dwell? Between the Dead Sea Sect, Diaspora Judaism, Rabbinic Literature, and Christianity," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context: Integrating the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Study of Ancient Texts, Languages and Cultures*, vol. 1, eds. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold (Boston: Brill, 2011), 399-412; and Joseph Sievers, "'Where Two or Three...': The Rabbinic Concept of *Shekhinah* and Matt 18, 20," in *Standing Before God: Studies on Prayer in Scripture and Tradition, with Essays in Honor of John M. Oesterreicher*, eds. Asher Finkel and Lawrence Frizzell (New York: Ktav, 1981), 171-182. According to Hacham, the concept of a divine presence dwelling with the people of Israel, instead of only in the physical Temple, originated after the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian Exile. This concept was further developed after the destruction of the Second Temple. Christians came to understand their own community as the locus of God's presence. However, Hacham hypothesizes, the tannaitic rabbis may have countered this notion, arguing that the divine presence is with rabbinic Jews and their ilk, not Christians. Meanwhile, for Sievers, when Jesus states in Matt 18:20, "'For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them,'" he is referring to the *Shekhinah*. Sievers believes that when Matt 18:20 is compared with m. Avot 3:2, it becomes probable that Jesus' saying is based on a rabbinic formulation, and that the author of the saying knew of the *Shekhinah* and had it in mind. However, the term "*Shekhinah*" as Sievers himself admits, only appears in rabbinic literature. Thus, there is no evidence that can fully prove Sievers' argument. Without further evidence, a more cautious approach would be to follow Hacham, who argues that both rabbinic Judaism and Christianity appear to have drawn on a divine presence theology that originated after the destruction of the First Temple. The question of whether Jews and Christians understand and experience God's presence in the same way may not be determined purely by historical investigation. As Sievers writes, "Ultimately, especially for Jews, the question is not only theological, but also historical. How can nineteen hundred years of separation, conflict, persecution, and indifference be overcome?" (Sievers, 179). In other words, are Jews and Christians willing to decide together that they experience the divine presence in the same way? Are they willing to call that divine presence by the same name?

aspects, in order to interact with the rabbinic material authentically and meaningfully. Moreover, it required a physical body that was willing to sit for long hours without moving, so that I could adequately delve into the biblical and rabbinic texts. At first, dedicating myself in these ways was like any other academic enterprise I had experienced: it was work that an external human force required or desired of me. But as time went on, and as I made a conscious effort to strive in this project for the sake of Torah—this divine teaching, which had been given by the Creator to be known in all of its detail—I realized that what I was doing was an act of devotion. I was giving my whole self, my mind, my body, my identity, not to another human, but to God, and in the process, as I wrote above, I was forming an intimate connection to God.

This combined action—union and devotion—with an intensity that was different in character but on par with praise songs, caused me to experience Torah study as an act of worship akin to praise songs.

Needless to say, at the end of a long study session of the Torah, I would frequently find myself both mentally and physically exhausted. That exhaustion, however, was different from what I would normally experience when engaging in any other time-intensive, arduous task. My experience, I find, is captured well by the following midrash:

At his right hand was a fiery law unto them [Deut 33:2]: This shows that the words of Torah are likened to fire. Just as fire was given from heaven, so were the words of Torah given from heaven, as it is said, *Ye yourselves have seen that I have talked with you from heaven* (Exod 10:19). Just as fire lives forever, so do the words of Torah live forever. Just as fire scorches him who draws near it, while he who is far away from it is chilled, so is it with words of Torah: if one occupies himself with them, they give him life, but if he departs from them, they cause his death. Just as fire is used both in this world and in the world to come, so the words of Torah are used both in this world and in the world to come. Just as fire

leaves a mark upon the body of one who uses it, so the words of Torah leave a mark upon the body of him who uses them.¹⁵⁰⁵

The midrash describes the effect Torah study will have on an individual: like fire, the one who studies Torah will be given life. But like fire, there is a burning that occurs when studying Torah. What the midrash is indicating, I believe, parallels one of Malachi's prophecies:

¹See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. ²But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; ³he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.¹⁵⁰⁶

Like the messenger that Malachi speaks of, Torah is a refiner's fire, purifying silver and gold so that one's offering becomes pleasing to the Lord. Exactly as the midrash teaches, at the end of a long session engaging in *Torah lishmah*, I felt as if I had been altered, as if a part of me had been burned away, and what was left was now lighter, more refined than before. The closest analogy I can derive is the aftermath of an intense physical labor, in which, with severe exhaustion and torn muscles, one feels as if one's body has been "burned." Mixed with the exhaustion is a feeling of amelioration, a sense that one's whole body, not just the physical aspects, has been positively shaped. Similar also to intense physical labor, *Torah lishmah* operated best at regular intervals. When I broke my rhythm or paused for an extended period of time, it was as if the amelioration I had

¹⁵⁰⁵ *Sifre Devarim* 343. Translation from Hammer, *Sifre*, 355.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Mal 3:1-4.

undergone atrophied. It was not dramatic, but it was noticeable.¹⁵⁰⁷ In this way, *Torah lishmah* for me was a kind of ascetic practice—not in the sense of denial of body or creaturely comforts, but in the sense of rigorous exercise of both body and mind. Michael Satlow has made a similar observation about the Palestinian rabbis of late antiquity.¹⁵⁰⁸ Satlow argues that for these rabbis, Torah study was a rabbinic form of asceticism, requiring the engagement of one's physical body and intellect. Employing imagery of battle and labor,¹⁵⁰⁹ the rabbis believed that Torah study effected purification in a person, helping one subdue the evil inclination.¹⁵¹⁰ Whether *Torah lishmah* produced for me a more righteous life would be an audacious claim at best. What I can say is that the ameliorative effect of *Torah lishmah* made me more receptive to God's presence.¹⁵¹¹

I emphasized in the introduction to this dissertation that *Torah lishmah* requires that one desire no benefits, that the study of Torah should be done for its own sake and no other. Nevertheless, I also noted that many rabbinic texts go at lengths to discuss the benefits one receives from Torah study. The benefits I experienced were myriad, much of them in the form of comparative insights, which I endeavored to discuss throughout each of the *Mekhilta* chapters. In what follows, I will summarize one that was particularly profound for me from each commandment:

¹⁵⁰⁷ Perhaps this is what Shammai was referring to when he taught that one should engage regularly in Torah study. See m. Avot 1:15.

¹⁵⁰⁸ See Michael Satlow, "'And on the Earth You Shall Sleep': *Talmud Torah* and Rabbinic Asceticism," *The Journal of Religion* 83:2 (Apr. 2003): 204-225.

¹⁵⁰⁹ See Satlow, 217-218. An example of Torah study being described in battle imagery is found in *Sifre Devarim* 321. An example of Torah study being described as labor can be found in *Sifre Devarim* 41.

¹⁵¹⁰ For more on the evil inclination, see footnote 957.

¹⁵¹¹ The kind of evangelical Bible study that I referred to earlier is done in both group or individual settings. In group settings, the Bible is frequently read aloud. In individual settings, reading is often done silently. Torah study in late antique rabbinic Judaism involved reciting or reading the text aloud, and may have been usually done in the form of chants (see e.g., b. Sanhedrin 99a-b). Torah study, in this way, incorporated a melodic experience. My five year engagement with *Torah lishmah* did not involve chanting, but was conducted mostly with reading in silence. The effect chanting may have on study and the affinities it may hold with evangelical worship songs deserves future study.

1. In discussions about the first commandment, I had not expected to encounter a rabbinic apologetic for Israel's chosenness, an argument on why Israel alone received the Torah (A.6). I noted in the comparative section that for an outsider, the midrash initially comes across as arrogant and triumphalist. Upon closer examination, I argued that the text could be useful and instructive for Christians. For someone who has heard exclusively or primarily the apologetics of one's own community, it can be helpful to hear the apologetics of another. Doing this can disturb and even destabilize one's preconceptions about one's own community and the other, opening a person up to new insights that may not have been previously considered. I was led to consider the fact that Israel was the last to be offered the Torah, which accentuated for me the reality that Christ did not go to the gentiles first, but to Israel. This unnerved my evangelical belief that each person is special or unique. But at the same time, it put me in a similar place to the *Mekhilta*: I am not the first chosen and acknowledging this fact can be a helpful source of humility.
2. The greatest challenge presented to me from the *Mekhilta*'s midrashim on the second commandment was the ban on all artwork (B.6). I noted that Catholics, Orthodox, and inheritors of Catholic theology (via Lutherans) accept artwork in churches and veneration of images. Meanwhile, those who are influenced by Zwingli, Calvin, Puritans, Anabaptists, and Mennonites reject artwork in churches or for veneration, either completely or with strict caveats. None of them, however, ban artwork in other contexts, provided such artwork does not encourage immoral thoughts or behavior. The *Mekhilta*'s ban on all artwork is meant to preclude any

possibility of idolatry. This position may seem too extreme. Indeed, it did for me when I first read it. I began thinking about what I would have to part with if I were to follow the *Mekhilta*: a Benedictine cross I bought at a monastery during a study abroad semester in Ireland, which has served as a commemoration of the transformation I had undergone during my time there; a painting of a Venetian bridge that my late grandmother had bought during her travels in Italy; a picture of Superman my daughter made for me for Father's Day. The list goes on. As I continued to catalogue everything I would have to relinquish, I began to realize the very point the *Mekhilta* was making: what would happen if I were to lose any of these? How deeply would I grieve the loss? Does the intensity of my grief indicate the extent to which I have already begun to idolize these objects? Do I take idolatry as seriously as I think I do? Perhaps, as the *Mekhilta* points out, the extent to which one seeks to protect oneself from idolatry reveals the degree to which one finds the commandment to be important.

3. The relation between general rules and particular instances that the *Mekhilta* deals with in the third commandment (C.1) exposed an issue in my own understanding of forgiveness and love. The *Mekhilta* points out that according to the general rule of Lev 5:4-6, vain oaths, such as Exod 20:7, require a sacrifice for atonement. However, sacrifices cannot be conducted in the post-Second Temple world of the *Mekhilta*; thus, a different solution is required. The *Mekhilta* decides to isolate Exod 20:7 from the general rule, in order to apply a leniency; but in doing this, a strictness needs to be applied. This allows the *Mekhilta* to select a different punishment, one that can still be conducted in the *Mekhilta*'s own time: lashes.

While some of the evangelical commentators observe that Exod 20:7 has a strongly-worded motive clause—“the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name”—only one of the commentators attempts to treat it at length. Philip Ryken argues that forgiveness for violating Exod 20:7 is provided by Christ, who has fulfilled all sacrifices in his atoning death. In the logic of the *Mekhilta*, Ryken is applying a leniency to the particular instance of Exod 20:7. From the *Mekhilta*’s perspective, in order for the process to be complete, there also needs to be a strictness applied. As already noted, consequences for breaking Exod 20:7 do not garner significant attention among the evangelical commentators. I suspect the reason is due to a tendency in evangelical circles to believe that forgiveness includes the cessation of punishment, that when Christ forgives all sins, this also means one will not face punishment. The *Mekhilta*, however, insists on punishment. One of the reasons seems to be that the tough love of punishment is essential to one’s development. If there are no negative consequences, not only is the likelihood of first time or repeat offense greater, but the seriousness of the commandment is undermined. By insisting on punishment, the *Mekhilta* makes unambiguously clear that the commandment is of utmost importance. This is perhaps worth considering for evangelicals. Up to this point, I had believed that the motivation for following a commandment should derive purely from one’s love of God and others. But might it be that love and punishments can actually work well together, and generate an even greater likelihood of following a commandment? Of course, the *Mekhilta*’s solution of lashes will likely seem outrageous in today’s world, but might some other punishment be fitting?

4. In addressing the fourth commandment, I noted that various evangelical commentators attempt to downplay the significance of the Sabbath. Yet, there is also a strong tendency to promote, and even reclaim, the importance of the Sabbath for Christians. For example, Fretheim calls the Sabbath a gift for Christians. Carpenter, moving in a similar direction, argues that when Israel practices the Sabbath, the image of God is restored in God's people. The Israelites needed one day a week to focus on God; otherwise, they would eventually come to neglect God. The same, Carpenter argues, is true of Christians. Through the *Mekhilta's* midrashim and the arguments offered by commentators such as Carpenter and Fretheim, I became steadily convinced that observing the Sabbath is a critical part of Christian life. With this realization, I found that the *Mekhilta* offers a variety of ways to facilitate one's ability to observe the Sabbath and treat it as the gift it is. One of the *Mekhilta's* proposals is to add from non-holy time to holy time (D.2). The *Mekhilta* derives this proposal from the different wording of the Sabbath commandment in Exodus ("remember") and Deuteronomy ("observe"). One should remember the Sabbath before it comes and observe it after it has gone. Adding from non-holy time to holy time would not only extend the length of the day, thereby allowing one to worship God and experience God's gift a little longer, but would also increase the holiness of the day, marking it as distinct from all other days through its added length.

When I first started making comparisons between the *Mekhilta* and Christian commentaries, I was invigorated by the insights I was discovering, and the search for

them became my primary drive to study Torah. However, over time, it occurred to me that making the search for insights my primary motivation undermined my effort toward *Torah lishmah*, as my desire to study Torah was no longer for its own sake, but for the sake of insights. I needed to recalibrate my disposition. Doing this required constant vigilance. By no means have I mastered the recalibration. As I noted at the beginning of this section, none of my endeavors have been perfect. In my initial attempts to recalibrate, I sought the other extreme: a rejection of any enjoyment from the benefits that were arising from Torah study. I naively thought *Torah lishmah* needed to be dispassionate, and that any emotion was a sign that I had begun to stray. I surmised that if I could accomplish this, I would uproot any ulterior motive. However, as more time drew on, I came to the conclusion that benefits from Torah study and the enjoyment of them are natural and gratifying. One need not dwell in either extreme. Rather, one can welcome the benefits when one sees an opportunity. The trick is to not make this the highest or sole focus. If Torah study is like a river, and benefits are like the thrill of rapids, then *Torah lishmah* is the grip one maintains on one's oar when the water is either white or clear.

Over the years, my desire for comparative insight did actually lessen. Rav Judah, the rabbi whom I discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, was correct. *She-lo lishmah* indeed leads to *lishmah*. In the midst of studying Torah for other reasons, I came to develop a capacity to study the Torah for its own sake.¹⁵¹² Again, by no means were my efforts perfect, but perfection is not necessarily what Rav Judah is describing. Rather,

¹⁵¹² B. Nazir 23b

his argument is that humans are filled with conflictual motivations and desires, and that the one who has an end goal in mind will eventually begin to sort them out.

Before moving on, there is one more observation I would like to make. It was in my effort to recalibrate, and the eventual realizations that followed, that the most profound development of all came: I began to embrace the study of Torah—to the point that I became passionate about it. Before I encountered rabbinic Judaism, my training in biblical studies had formed me into a person that sought out the “correct answer.” By sifting through Christian and non-confessional biblical commentaries and evaluating each of them, I could arrive at my own sound interpretation. Studying the *Mekhilta*—with its long lists of דברים אחרים (“additional interpretations”), its prolonged focus on individual phrases, its refusal to gloss over repetitions, its penchant for introducing seemingly unrelated biblical texts, etc.—all of this forced me to deaccelerate, to examine each detail of the biblical text carefully, even down to the spelling of a word. Through this retraining, I found that Torah study, when done to its fullest capacity, does involve the search for correct interpretations, but it also involves the long exploration of a text, in order to uncover all of the detail that might be found in it. My realization of this caused me to see *Torah lishmah* as a slowing down of the interpretive process, so that I could go deeper. This required the cultivation of a desire to understand Torah in all of its vastness, which I found manifesting within me through a persistent effort to understand the *Mekhilta*. As my desire grew, I came to see that my mapping out of the similarities and differences between the *Mekhilta*, Augustine, and evangelical commentaries was not simply for the purpose of comparative insight. Rather, I needed all of the voices I could handle to uncover everything I could not see on my own. This became an all-consuming endeavor.

By the end of the five years, I often found myself having to pull away from my study in order to sleep, eat, or spend necessary time with family. Sometimes I would glance up at the clock to realize several hours had passed. Torah study had become a deep passion for me. It stirred an aspect of my being—who I was as a creature of God. Through its hard work, it became an act of worship, a giving of myself out of love and loyalty, which in turn, evoked a kind of divine intimacy I had not found through any other means.

8.2 CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD OF COMPARATIVE THEOLOGY

This dissertation is a project geared for evangelicals, but it is also a work of Christian confessional comparative theology. I have reflected at length in this conclusion and throughout the dissertation on the significance of this project for the former. To end, I would like to reflect briefly on what I believe this project contributes to the comparative theological community.

Over the last few decades, the volume of Christian comparative theological works has grown substantially. New projects emerge every year on comparisons between aspects of Christianity and a wide range of other religious traditions. Nevertheless, if one were to survey the number of comparative works between Christianity and Judaism, one would find that Judaism is not a popular tradition among Christian comparative theologians, at least not in comparison to other religious traditions. A decade ago, Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski argued that the reason is because a latent Christian supersessionism abides in Christian comparative theology. Supersessionism has caused Christians throughout the centuries to intentionally ignore or be blithely unaware of the evolution of

Judaism since the biblical period. Jews in the present have been thought to be roughly the same as the Jews in the New Testament era. This has influenced Christians of all denominations and theological disciplines—including Christian comparative theologians—to neglect “traditional Jewish texts as resources for theological reflection.”¹⁵¹³ What Joslyn-Siemiatkoski means by “traditional Jewish texts” is rabbinic literature (e.g., the Babylonian Talmud, Yerushalmi, Tosefta, and midrash), which is often dismissed as either a “perversion of the scriptural texts, containing blasphemies about Jesus and Mary”¹⁵¹⁴ or “legalistic, particularist, and inscrutable in its attention to minutiae.”¹⁵¹⁵

Since the publication of Joslyn-Siemiatkoski’s article, three highly intriguing works have emerged that engage rabbinic literature through comparative theology, two by evangelicals and one by Joslyn-Siemiatkoski himself. In *Jewish Biblical Legends: Rabbinic Wisdom for Christian Readers*,¹⁵¹⁶ Joel Allen explores multiple midrashim on biblical stories, from creation to Sinai, and discerns how they might inform contemporary Christian interpretations. In *Exploring Our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal*,¹⁵¹⁷ Marvin Wilson utilizes dozens of rabbinic texts from the Talmud and midrash (in addition to biblical, theological, and exegetical texts from both Judaism and Christianity) to uncover the “Hebraic” roots of Christianity, which not only provides helpful critiques of various aspects of Christian beliefs and practices, but offers

¹⁵¹³ Daniel Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “Comparative Theology and the Status of Judaism,” in *The New Comparative Theology: Thinking Interreligiously in the 21st Century*, ed. by Francis X. Clooney (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 89, 91, 95. Quotation from p. 95.

¹⁵¹⁴ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “Comparative Theology,” 91.

¹⁵¹⁵ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, “Comparative Theology,” 98.

¹⁵¹⁶ Joel S. Allen, *Jewish Biblical Legends: Rabbinic Wisdom for Christian Readers* (Eugene: Cascade, 2013).

¹⁵¹⁷ Marvin Wilson, *Exploring our Hebraic Heritage: A Christian Theology of Roots and Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

promising alternatives. Finally, in *The More Torah, the More Life*, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski performs a sustained commentary on Mishnah Avot. These are welcome additions, as they effectively begin to address the lacuna named by Joslyn-Siemiatkoski a decade ago.¹⁵¹⁸

Each of these three scholars has a particular focus in rabbinic literature. Allen concentrates specifically on aggadic midrashim. Wilson draws on both Talmud and midrash throughout his monograph to address Christian theological concerns and practices. Meanwhile, Joslyn-Siemiatkoski focuses on the genre of wisdom literature.¹⁵¹⁹ What is distinct about my contribution is that it is a sustained supercommentary on a text classified under *midrash halakhah*, with a specific disposition drawn from rabbinic Judaism to accompany it. In addition, while there have been other studies and comparisons of Jewish and Christian commentaries on the Decalogue,¹⁵²⁰ mine is the first to engage in a late antique rabbinic and patristic comparison, *and* provide reflections on how Christians may learn from the process.

The ways in which I have conducted comparative theological learning throughout the dissertation have been diverse. In a new manual on comparative theology, Catherine Cornille lists six different modes of comparative learning that one may utilize in one's own work:

¹⁵¹⁸ To be sure, neither Allen nor Wilson mention Joslyn-Siemiatkoski. This, of course, is not necessary. What is important is that their work addresses Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's concerns.

¹⁵¹⁹ Joslyn-Siemiatkoski, *More Torah*, 9-14.

¹⁵²⁰ See Ben-Zion Segal, ed., and Gershon Levi, English version ed., *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1990); George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, eds., *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions About Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (Boston: Leiden, 2008); Henning Reventlow Graf and Yair Hoffman, eds. *The Decalogue in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011); Roger E. Van Harn, ed., *The Ten Commandments for Jews, Christians, and Others* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Dominik Markl, ed., *The Decalogue and Its Cultural Influence* (Sheffield: Phoenix, 2013); J. Cornelis de Vos, *Rezeption und Wirkung des Dekalogs in jüdischen und christlichen Schriften bis 200 n. Chr* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

1. Intensification – similarities across religious traditions lead to a greater appreciation, reaffirmation, or commitment to a belief or practice in one’s own tradition.¹⁵²¹
2. Rectification – one’s understanding of another tradition is corrected, which in turn alters the understanding of one’s own tradition.¹⁵²²
3. Recovery – a text, belief, practice, etc. in another tradition leads one to rediscover something within one’s own tradition that had been “neglected, forgotten, marginalized, or even declared heretical.”¹⁵²³
4. Reinterpretation – a text, belief, practice, etc. in one’s own tradition is reinterpreted by use of the philosophical framework or categories of another tradition.¹⁵²⁴
5. Appropriation – the integration of an element from another tradition into one’s own.¹⁵²⁵
6. Reaffirmation – differences across religious traditions lead to a greater appreciation, reaffirmation, or commitment to a belief or practice in one’s own tradition.¹⁵²⁶

Almost all of these modes of comparative learning have been utilized throughout this dissertation. To provide examples, I will identify how each of the four insights I listed above in the previous section make use of one of the modes. Intensification was used in number two (B.6). The *Mekhilta*’s effort to prevent any possibility of idolatry encouraged

¹⁵²¹ Cornille, 116-118.

¹⁵²² Cornille, 121.

¹⁵²³ Cornille, 124.

¹⁵²⁴ Cornille, 129.

¹⁵²⁵ Cornille, 134.

¹⁵²⁶ Cornille, 137. Cornille notes that this must be done with care, as any sign of rejection of another tradition could be seen as offensive. See Cornille, 141.

me to revisit and intensify my own efforts to prevent myself from committing idolatry. Recovery was used in number four (D.2). The *Mekhilta*'s argument to add non-Sabbath time to Sabbath time aided me in recovering the Sabbath as a gift for Christians. Reinterpretation was involved in number one (A.6). The *Mekhilta*'s theological acknowledgment that Israel was not the first chosen caused me to reinterpret my own sense of chosenness. Appropriation came into use in number three (C.1). I used the *Mekhilta*'s exegetical rule on the relationship between general rules and particular instances to reconsider the place of punishment in the economy of forgiveness and love. Finally, rectification has been an underlying goal throughout the dissertation, which has been an effort to approach rabbinic Judaism, not from a place of critique and judgment, but from a place of humility and respect.

The one mode of comparative learning I did not utilize was reaffirmation. This was intentional, and it is not because I believe there is unequivocally no use for this mode, but because Christianity has had a long history of practicing various forms of reaffirmation in relation to Judaism. In some ways, it has acted as a second nature, ending prematurely the possibility of genuine learning and challenge. In this dissertation, rather than reaffirm my own beliefs and practices in contrast to Judaism, I have suggested that when one encounters a text, belief, or practice within the *Mekhilta* that at first looks wholly out of bounds of Christianity, the first reflex should be to pause at length and attempt to consider any potential truth. Such deep reflection may eventually be led to reaffirmation. But if one rushes to this conclusion, a potential learning opportunity may be lost.

According to Cornille, rectification often encapsulates Christian-Jewish comparative theology. She classifies Joslyn-Siemiatkoski's *The More Torah, the More Life* as an example: in his work, he engages a rabbinic text as a source of learning that Christian supersessionism has influenced Christians to ignore or denigrate.¹⁵²⁷ Rectification certainly plays a strong role in my project, but my *primary* goal has not been to correct my understanding of rabbinic Judaism. Rather, my primary aim has been to approach something that is supposedly a central part of my own tradition (i.e., a part of scriptural canon) in a more meaningful way. Thus, I am led to believe that rectification does not fully encapsulate the overall mode of learning that my dissertation utilizes. Nor do any of the other modes. Recovery does encompass the dissertation to a large degree. My engagement with the *Mekhilta* does inspire me to recover the legal material within my own tradition and explore it in new ways. But what makes recovery possible, according to Cornille, is a similar and yet distinct element in another tradition that inspires one to seek out something similar in one's own. As an example, Cornille underscores Gavin Flood, whose study of the *Bhagavad Gītā* led him to an in depth study of Evagrius Ponticus' views on "the relationship between detachment, cosmology, and the master," which has often been "underemphasized" in Christianity.¹⁵²⁸ In my project, while the interpretive traditions of rabbinic Judaism and Christianity are largely distinct, my engagement with the *Mekhilta* does not lead me to a recovery of a similar and yet distinct element in my own tradition. Rather, it leads me to a shared text between the two traditions, the Decalogue.

¹⁵²⁷ Cornille, 124.

¹⁵²⁸ Cornille, 127.

Reinterpretation may also seem to encompass the dissertation, but as Cornille articulates, reinterpretation involves understanding an aspect of one's own tradition differently through the philosophical or conceptual categories of another tradition. For example, Cornille points to Raimon Panikkar who used the Advaita Vedānta tradition to reinterpret traditional understandings of christology.¹⁵²⁹ While at times I engage philosophically and conceptually with the *Mekhilta*, much of the comparative insight emerges on the exegetical level. If Cornille's definition of reinterpretation included exegesis, then reinterpretation would more likely qualify as an overall mode of learning; however, what still prevents me from selecting this mode is that reinterpretation involves insights derived from comparing aspects in two traditions that are similar and yet *distinct*. What is involved in my dissertation is engagement with the *same* text, but through different approaches.

Given these distinctions, I believe a new mode may encapsulate more fully a project, such as mine, that undertakes a comparison of commentaries on the *same* text. I propose that this new mode be referred to as "realignment." This term speaks to a type of engagement in which one approaches a shared subject between two traditions through the angle of the other tradition. Each angle originates from different sources, i.e., different traditions. Insight is generated from a comparison of one's own angle of approach with that of the other's. In my case, the rabbinic and Christian traditions form the different sources. The shared subject matter is the legal material of the Hebrew Bible. The distinct angles are the methods, presuppositions, and interpretations of each tradition. By coming

¹⁵²⁹ Cornille, 130-131.

into contact with a rabbinic commentary, I realign myself to a text that is shared by both traditions.

8.3 BEYOND THIS DISSERTATION

At the end of her manual on comparative theology, Cornille argues that comparative theology and confessional theology possess a symbiotic relationship. While comparative theology generates new insights through its interactions with other religious traditions, “confessional theology grounds comparative theology within a normative tradition which may help in directing its focus, and inform the process of discerning the truth of other religions. It also establishes accountability of the comparative theologian to a particular community of faith and practice, allowing for a broader reception and dissemination of the fruits of comparative theology.”¹⁵³⁰

Having proposed *Torah lishmah* as a useful disposition, and having explored its significance in a comparison of the *Mekhilta*, Augustine, and evangelical commentaries, I now leave this work to the evangelical and comparative theological community to determine its merits or deficiencies. In the meantime, the next step for me will be to continue to test the compatibility of *Torah lishmah* with the evangelical tradition. I noted in the introduction to this dissertation that I turned my focus to the Decalogue because I believed a known text would facilitate interaction with rabbinic exegesis. The next step is to engage a more obscure legal text from the Hebrew Bible and a rabbinic commentary to

¹⁵³⁰ Cornille, 150.

accompany it, and from this, determine whether my experience with *Torah lishmah* continues to be what I have initially found, or whether there is still yet more to be discovered in the depths of Torah.

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