

**Redemptive Love as the Ground of Obedience in Exodus: An Examination of
Israel's Response to its Election from the Exodus Tradition**

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Abstract

Israel is pictured in the OT as the *segulla* of YHWH, thus becoming his treasured or special possession through his redemptive love. This creates a special relationship between YHWH and Israel with obligations. How was Israel to respond to the redemptive love of God through which it became his elect? Through narrative analysis and the conceptual framework of redemption in the OT, this paper explores the OT theme of redemptive love of God in the book of Exodus. It traces and explains the redemptive love of God for his people and the consequences and the obligations of Israel in the face of this redemptive love. Due to this special love of YHWH, Israel was obliged to obey him through the observance of his commandments to remain his special people and a worshipping community. Obedience to God's commandment, meant to be Israel's reciprocal love for YHWH, was thus to become the determining factor in Israel's relationship to God. Nonetheless, Exodus witnesses as well to the infidelity of Israel in the face of its obligation to obey YHWH.

Keywords: Israel, Old Testament, Exodus, Redemption, Election, Obedience

1. Introduction

The book of Exodus contains traditions on the formation of Israel and its relationship to its God, YHWH. It gives a historical background to the love of God for his people and how he entered into a covenant with them. Through the redemptive love of YHWH, exhibited in his love for Israel through the redemption from Egypt, as seen in the book of Exodus, Israel was to respond through its obedience to the dictates of the covenant. In this paper, I have discussed the book of Exodus with particular reference

to the redemptive love of YHWH for Israel and Israel's response to YHWH's redemptive love. This was discussed alongside the conceptual foundations of redemption in the Old Testament (OT) in general.

2. The Book of Exodus

Exodus, the second book of the Pentateuch, is very significant to the biblical traditions.¹ It contains the narratives on the formation of Israel as a people,² their sojourn in Egypt and their consequent liberation from slavery. It forms as it were the core of the traditions of the people of Ancient Israel. In this vein, Sarna affirms,

Exodus may rightly be looked upon as the seminal book of the Hebrew Scriptures in that it features the pivotal events of Israel's history and the fundamental institutions of its culture and religion.³

Thus the book of Exodus serves as a historiographical witness to the origins of the fundamental institutions of the people of Ancient Israel. It gives the accounts of the establishment of the Passover, the covenant that God made with Israel and the Decalogue that became the stipulations of the covenant and the institution of the cult. These institutions as well as the exodus motif and traditions recur and are alluded to in almost all the books of the OT as a result of their significance in their history.⁴ Exodus further indicates Israel's immediate response to the covenant and the other divine institutions. In this regard, the history of ancient Israel was written with the focus on how Israel responded to the covenant that God made with them, as the covenant became the fulcrum around which their relationship with their God, YHWH, revolved.

¹ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, "Exodus." In *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, edited by Leander

² James K. Hoffmeier, "The Exodus and Wilderness Narratives." In *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, edited by Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess, 46-90. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 46-47.

³ Nahum M. Sarna, *Book of Exodus*. Vol. II, in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 689-700. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 690.

⁴ Sarna, *Book of Exodus*, 698; K. A. Kitchen, "The Exodus." In *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman, 700-708. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 701; Amos Frisch, "The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1 - 14." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 87 (2000): 3-21, 3-4; Hoffmeier, "The Exodus and Wilderness Narratives", 47.

The book could be broadly divided into seven sections, forming a linear structure.⁵

- A. Israel in Egypt (1:1-12:42)
- B. Passover and the Exodus (12:43-15:21)
- C. The wandering in the Wilderness (15:22-18:27)
- D. Religious Laws and the Covenant (19-24)
- E. Prescription for the Tabernacle and the institution of the Cult (25-31)
- F. Breaking of the Covenant and its Renewal (32-34)
- G. Construction of the Tabernacle (35-40)

The first section, Exodus 1:1-12:42, narrates Israel's bondage in Egypt and God's desire to liberate them from the oppressive regime of the Pharaoh. The narrative opens with Israel in Egypt using some text-elements to link the narrative to the book of Genesis. It begins with the list of the family that came to Egypt and presents a new king who did not know Joseph, the main character of Genesis 37-50. It introduces Moses who became the main instrument that God used to liberate his people, the Hebrews, from the slavery in Egypt. This part of the narrative is put in a contest between God and the political power of the Pharaoh in Egypt.

The second section, Exodus 12:43-15:21, describes the institution of the Passover and the festival of the unleavened bread and the eventual liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt. This act of God was accompanied by the wonder of the tenth plague of the death of the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, but sparing the firstborn males of the Hebrews. This section concludes with the departure of Israel from Egypt and the crossing of the sea of reeds.

The section three, Exodus 15:22-18:27, concerns Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. This section introduces their attempt to neglect their God in their need for basic necessities, as seen in their murmurings and complaints against Moses. They however experienced the divine providence of YHWH, as they received from him the manna to satisfy their hunger and water to quench their thirst. This section ends with the introduction of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, through whose advice Moses made

⁵ Like most books of the Bible, its structure is fluid and some scholars differ in the demarcation of the structure. Cf. Ambrogio Spreafico, *Il libro dell'Esodo*. (Roma: Citta Nuova Editrice, 2002). Brueggemann, "Exodus."; Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

simple guidelines for the settlement of disputes among the Israelites, setting the pace for the observance of laws among the people.

The next section, Exodus 19-24, indicates the arrival of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai and recounts God's commandments and laws given to the people of Israel, which became the stipulations of the covenant. It further narrates the establishment of the covenant and its ratification. This section elaborates how Israel became the elect and the *segulla* "treasured possession" of YHWH.⁶ Due to its election, Israel was to behave in accordance with the will of God by observing some religious and social norms prescribed in this section. Thus Israel was to pursue justice in their relationship with God and the neighbour.

The fifth section, Exodus 25-31, deals with the prescriptions and specifications of the construction of the altar and the tabernacle. It describes also the decoration of the tabernacle. The establishment of the tabernacle and the cult necessitated the institution of the priesthood. Aaron and his sons are given the responsibility to serve as priests and so ushering in the Aaronic priesthood. This section prescribes the vestments and the rites of ordination among others that are required for the priestly office.

The sixth section, Exodus 32-34, seems to be an interpolation within the narrative on the instructions to build the tabernacle, in the preceding block of narrative, and the establishment of the tabernacle that comes after it. This part presents the first attempt of Israel at disobedience to the covenant. The building of the golden calf and its worship indicate Israel's disobedience to the first commandment that forbids idolatry. The nature of God as merciful is depicted in this section leading to the renewal of the covenant.

The last section, Exodus 35-40, narrates the construction of the tabernacle, whose prescriptions, specifications and decorations were given in the fifth part of the book. The actual building of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant as well as the items that go along with them take place in this section. The book concludes on the tone of worship: the institution of the cult. The Ark of the Covenant is built to indicate the

⁶ Cf. Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel: An Exegetical Study*. Vol. 95, in *Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im alten Testament*. (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2013), 260.

presence of God among his people. The book thus ends with the erection of the tabernacle and thus concluding on the note that God dwells among his people.⁷

3. Conceptual Foundations of Redemption in OT with Exodus as a Model

Redemption is a recurring theme in the OT. It is commonly understood as the advent of a just and a wise redeemer-king who will bring about the liberation of slaves and the return of the exiles.⁸ This ordinary meaning must be understood in its later reference to the exilic and post-exilic situation of Israel. The concept is originally associated with the paying of a ransom in order to liberate a people under captivity, bondage or slavery. In short, it connotes liberation and deliverance. Some words are very significant in explaining the OT concept of redemption with particular reference to the book of Exodus, some of which are worthy of discussion.⁹ These words are גָּאָל “gā’al,” פָּדָה “pādāh” and נָצַל “nzl,” which are translated in the English versions as “to redeem” and its associated terms, such as “to deliver”, “to rescue”, “to buy/purchase”, and “to save”.

The first one, gā’al, comes from a juridical vocabulary concerning civil and family laws.¹⁰ It is used in the sense of one claiming back something or a person from another’s authority or to buy back in order to have a legal possession of what one claims back.¹¹ Due to its reference to the idea of “buying back”, the expression אֵלֶּיךָ קָנִיתִי “the people that you bought/acquired” in Exodus 15:16 is used in a synonymous context to refer to the redemption of Israel from Egypt.¹² gā’al is used in some contexts to denote an original owner’s redeeming of a “value assessed” or “consecrated things.”¹³ It is used with God as the subject to refer to a personal relationship to deliver one from death, bondage, as occurring in Exodus 6:4; 15:13,

⁷ Meyers, *Exodus*, 283.

⁸ Cf. Philip Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts*. (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co.), 1975, 118-119.

⁹ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 174-178; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 268.

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 162.

¹¹ Koehler and Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 162.

¹² Wright, *The Mission of God*, 265.

¹³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 145.

and from exile as in Isaiah 43:1.¹⁴ This is usually used in the context of rescuing someone.¹⁵ It is used in the jubilee instructions in Leviticus 24:23-34 concerning the redemption of land and property by either a relative or a neighbour. Its use is connected more to family or blood ties than the neighbour.¹⁶

Another word to express the act of redemption is *pādāh*. It also comes from a juridical vocabulary concerning commercial law, used particularly in the case of the sale and repurchase of slaves, meaning “to ransom” or “to redeem.”¹⁷ It implies setting one free through the payment of a ransom. Redemption “implies deliverance and restitution but also a cost that must be paid.”¹⁸ The cost is used in the context of ransoming for an assessed price as occurring in Exodus 13:13-15, from violence and death as found in 1 Samuel 14:45 and from exile as in Jeremiah 31:11.¹⁹ *pādāh* unlike *gā'al* has a weaker sense of “to free” or “to deliver” from slavery and not connected to blood ties.²⁰

Nzl is another term used to explain the concept of redemption in the OT. This is not attested in the *Qal* form but rather used in the passive *Niphal* form to mean “to be delivered” and the *Hiphil* form to mean to “snatch away,” “take away,” “tear away” and “deliver.”²¹ In practical terms, it is used to denote snatching away “prey from the mouth of animals.”²² It is used in Exodus 5:23 in the complaint of Moses in the context of YHWH not delivering Israel from Egypt. It is attested in the *piel* form in Exodus 3:22 and 12:36 in the plundering of the Egyptians before Israel’s departure from Egypt.

Deducing from the above concepts, redemption has three important elements, deliverance, restitution and the ransom, which is the cost. The deliverance is in reference to the act and its consequence. The restitution refers to the restoration of the

¹⁴ Brown, Driver and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 145.

¹⁵ Werner H. Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: (The Westminster Press, 1983), 35.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, "Exodus", 324.

¹⁷ Koehler and Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 751-752.

¹⁸ James C. Leland Ryken, James Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1998), 698.

¹⁹ Brown, Driver and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 804.

²⁰ Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament*, 36.

²¹ Koehler and Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 630.

²² Brown, Driver and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 664.

one redeemed to its original status whereas the cost involved concerns what is used as the ransom to bring about the deliverance. Thus there are three important aspects of redemption, which are mainly the situation from which the person or the object needs to be ransomed, the ransom to be paid and the intermediary that executes the redemption.²³ In the OT, redemption took place in many aspects of life such as the regaining of slaves, property, such as land after a ransom that could be in the form of money has been paid (Leviticus 25).²⁴

The book of Exodus is very paradigmatic for the biblical concept of redemption. The incident of the burning bush in Exodus 3 opens the narratives of redemption in the exodus event. Moses receives a call from YHWH to be his instrument of deliverance of his people from the oppression of Pharaoh. In Exodus 3:12, the sign (תִּזְכֹּר) to be given as a witness that it is YHWH that has sent Moses will be that when he brings them out of Egypt, they will worship him on the mountain. This implies that the deliverance from Egypt is not just a to be a political liberation from slavery, but it is also to be a religious freedom.²⁵ Hoffmeier, in this light, describes their journey out of Egypt as “a religious pilgrimage to the mountain of God.”²⁶ Thus, the deliverance of the Hebrews is connected to the worship of YHWH on the mountain.

In the Passover instructions in Exodus 13,²⁷ there are ordinances on redeeming of human beings as well as animals. The Israelites were urged to dedicate the firstborn males of their livestock and the first male that opens the womb to YHWH, when they get into the land. By implication, the firstborn males belong to God according to the ordinance in verse 12. Verse 13 gives exception to those that could be redeemed. These are the donkeys and human beings. Of the livestock, only the donkey could be redeemed (*pādāh*) with sheep. Thus, the sheep was offered as a ransom in the place of the donkey to set it free. All the firstborn male children of the Israelites are however to be redeemed. Verse 14 refers to the bondage and the deliverance from Egypt as the basis or the reason for the ordinance.

²³ Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 698.

²⁴ Ryken, Wilhoit, and Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 698.

²⁵ Frisch, "The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1 - 14", 6; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 270.

²⁶ Hoffmeier, "The Exodus and Wilderness Narratives", 81.

²⁷ Cf. Exodus 34:19-20.

In Exodus 13:15, the tradition of the dedication of the firstborn male that opens the womb to YHWH stems from the stubbornness of the Pharaoh, however an exception is given to the firstborn sons of the Israelites to be redeemed. The killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians is attributed to the refusal of Pharaoh to let Israel go out of Egypt.²⁸ This implies that the contest between Pharaoh and YHWH in letting Israel leave Egypt led to the killing of the firstborn males but the firstborn male children of the Israelites are to be redeemed from that destruction. Hence, in Exodus 13:15, the redeeming of the firstborn sons of the Israelites was required by the deliverance from Egypt in order to spare them from the destruction. Israel like the firstborn, and by the fact of being the firstborn of YHWH, needed also to be redeemed from the bondage in Egypt.²⁹ In Exodus 4:22, Moses was to declare to the Pharaoh that Israel was the firstborn of YHWH.

4. Redemptive Love of God in the Light of the Exodus Tradition

Redemption of Israel is one of the major themes of the book of Exodus. The redemptive act in the book of Exodus becomes a model or paradigm of redemption in the other biblical narratives on liberation.³⁰ In Exodus, the redemptive love of God is depicted in his deliverance of Israel from the land of slavery in Egypt. God demonstrated his love for Israel by liberating them from the hand of the oppressive Pharaoh. This narrative is put in a form of a contest between God and Pharaoh, with God having a special redemptive love for Israel. The whole act is patterned on the act of redemption in the Ancient Near East. God as the liberator redeems Israel from the hand of a political power of Egypt.

Through this act of redemption, God makes or creates a people, a nation,³¹ for himself and they become the *segulla* or his special treasured possession.³² *segulla* in its Ancient Near Eastern context implies a possession that is acquired and valued rather

²⁸ Meyers, *Exodus*, 101-103.

²⁹ Cf. Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs." In *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, 749-945. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 775.

³⁰ Cf. Frisch, "The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1-14", 9-12; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 265.

³¹ Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 169-170.

³² Exodus 19:5

than a possession inherited.³³ It is used in the context of the exodus tradition to imply, God acquiring for himself a special people among all the people.³⁴ This act of Israel being a special people of God was established through the covenant that God made with them. It was YHWH who took the initiative to make them his people for the purpose that “they will serve and obey him.”³⁵ The covenant formula, “if you obey me and my commandments, you will become my people and I will become your God” and its similar formulations³⁶ bear witness to this act. Wright sums up the divine act of redemption as YHWH creating a family-like bond of relationship with Israel, and consequently accepting the obligation on their behalf to protect and rescue them.³⁷

Exodus 6:2-8 presents the picture of God’s plan to redeem the Israelites. In this text, YHWH declares his intention to redeem Israel. This message of redemption is colligated to the promises and the covenant God made with the patriarchs and its associated promise of the land in verses 3-4.³⁸ The patriarchal narrative is connected to the story of the book of Exodus and it serves as a preparatory ground for the exodus event. Most of the significant narratives in the exodus event have their antecedents in the narratives on the patriarchs, especially the covenants and the promises. Exodus 2:24 and 6:5-6 indicate that due to the fact that YHWH remembered (*zākar*) his covenant with the patriarchs, he intended to redeem the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt. Remembering his covenant in this context does not only imply recalling to mind, but rather calling to mind with the aim of taking action.³⁹ It means to relive experience or events of the past and making them “virtually present.”⁴⁰

The covenant with their ancestors and its associated promises to their descendants became the antecedents of God’s redemptive love in Exodus. There are a lot of connective elements linking the patriarchal narratives to the exodus. The book of Exodus opens with the list of the sons of Jacob that went to Egypt. The theophanic

³³ Meyers, *Exodus*, 146-147.

³⁴ Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel*, 259-260.

³⁵ Svetlana Knobnya, "God the Father in the Old Testament." *European Journal of Theology* 20, no. 2 (2011): 139-148, 139-140, 141.

³⁶ Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 28:1; 30:16.

³⁷ Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 267.

³⁸ Genesis 15:13-16

³⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, 272-273.

⁴⁰ James Alfred Loader, "Prosthetic Memory in the Old Testament." *Old Testament Essays* 25, no. 3 (2012): 583-597, 583.

episode in Exodus 3, in which the name of YHWH is revealed to Moses and the announcement of the liberation from Egypt is given, is colligated to the patriarchal history. YHWH who reveals himself to Moses is the God of the patriarchs as seen in Exodus 3:6. In a similar way, the covenant, around which the relationship of Israel and YHWH revolved, indicates God's commitment to the promises and the covenant he made with their ancestors, especially Abraham, in the book of Genesis. In this regard, Routledge finds the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus to be continuous with the Abrahamic covenant.⁴¹ Thus, the redemptive love of God in the book of Exodus has as its remote antecedent in the relationship that God established with their ancestors in the patriarchal narratives.⁴² The proximate or the immediate antecedent to the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant is the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Exodus 6:5-6 explains that due to the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt, YHWH remembered “זכר” his covenant and as a consequence intends to liberate them. The statements in verse 5, which emphasize YHWH's special relationship with Israel, serve as premises leading to the statement on the redemption in verse 6. In this statement, there is a promise to deliver “נצל” and to redeem “גאל” the Hebrews from Egypt within the context of the identity of YHWH, in such a way, making such actions of deliverance from Egypt and their redemption the essence of his name.⁴³ The fulfillment of a promise of a deity was seen in his actions and it was also perceived that deliverance from a mortal situation was an experience of “a relationship giving meaning to life.”⁴⁴ The encounter of YHWH with Israel in the act of redemption can therefore be seen in the context of a God giving life to a people he had established a relationship with through their ancestors.

Exodus 6:6 is introduced by לָכֵן, “thus” giving the identity of YHWH as the basis of which he will free and deliver them (וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבָדָתָם) from slavery. This statement on the deliverance from their slavery is complemented by the statement on

⁴¹ Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 169.

⁴² Cf. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 414.

⁴³ Cf. Spreafico, *Il libro dell'Esodo*, 53-54; Wright, *The Mission of God*, 274-275.

⁴⁴ Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers: Studies on the Patriarchal Narratives*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 162-163.

God redeeming them (וַיִּגְאֹלֵהֶם אֱתָכֶם) with mighty acts. Verses 7-8 recall the covenant formula as attested in relation to the covenant that God made with the patriarchs and its associated promises. The covenant formula assures the Israelites of their being a special people to YHWH, and he being their God.

The act of God in working out wonders for the people of Israel and bringing them out of bondage in Egypt is attributed to his redemptive love implicit in the Exodus tradition. This redemptive love stems from his covenant with their ancestors as explained above. The act of God's redemptive love is further developed in some parallel texts. In Deuteronomy 7:7-9, the choice of Israel is not due to its numerical strength, but rather as a result of YHWH's own love and the oath he swore to their forefathers. Verse 8 begins with a *ki*-clause giving the reason, as stated above, for God's choice of Israel.

The bringing of Israel out of Egypt through God's mighty deeds and the redemption from slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, took place as a result of God's love and the promise that he made to their ancestors as indicated.⁴⁵ These are clearly attested in Deuteronomy 7:8 in the following statements: כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם, "because YHWH loved you," וּמִשְׁמָרוֹ אֶת־הַשְּׁבֻעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְתֵּיכֶם, "because he kept the oath he swore to your fathers." The second part of the verse links the liberation of Israel from Egypt to the redemption of Israel. The main verb of the sentence וַיִּפְדֶּךָ, "ransomed/redeemed," has two direct objects in apposition, מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים, "from the house of slavery" and מִיַּד פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרָיִם, "from the hand of Pharaoh, King of Egypt". This makes the redemption from the house of slavery correspond to the redemption from the hand of Pharaoh.

The deuteronomistic historians and the chroniclers also associate the deliverance from slavery in Egypt with the redemption of Israel. David declares in his prayer to YHWH in 2 Samuel 7:23-24 and 1 Chronicles 17:21-22 that the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt was meant for YHWH to make a name for himself (וַיִּלְשֹׁם לֹו שֵׁם) and to make Israel a people for himself. Thus, the essence of God's act in delivering

⁴⁵ William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 119.

Israel was to make Israel his on people.

Moses and the Israelites declared God’s redemptive love in the song of Moses in Exodus 15:13. In the statement *בְּחַסְדְּךָ יְיָ עָמַדְתָּ לְאֶלְנָי*, “in/through your loving-kindness you led a people whom you redeemed,” the song sums up the nature of God exhibited in the exodus event.⁴⁶ *Hesed* used in *בְּחַסְדְּךָ*, could have various connotations as mercy, loving-kindness, faithfulness, loyalty and “a benevolent act which is done to the other usually in a relationship.”⁴⁷ The subsequent clause, *עָמַדְתָּ לְאֶלְנָי*, “a people whom you redeemed” describes the acts of deliverance from the bondage in Egypt and the redemption from the hand of the oppressing Pharaoh. The preposition *be* in *בְּחַסְדְּךָ*, could be seen in the context of instrumentality, thus making the act of redemption emerge out of the loving-kindness of God. The second part of the verse runs parallel to the first one. It recalls the wonders that God performed on behalf of his people in leading them out of slavery in Egypt. *בְּעֹזְךָ* could be translated as “by your strength” or “by your might.” It occurs in the same form in Psalm 74:13 in reference to the dividing of the sea in the exodus event. Thus, *בְּעֹזְךָ* in that context could refer to the mighty deeds that YHWH worked among his people.

The deeds performed on behalf of Israel by YHWH were as a result of his love for his people. This love of God for Israel is expressed through three significant OT Hebrew words, namely; *אַהֲבָה*, *’āhab*, “love”, *בָּחַר*, *bāhar*, “choose” and *הַשְׂאֵף*, *hāshaq* “set one’s heart” that point to the commitment of God to the people of Israel regarding their formation and election.⁴⁸ These connote concepts that do not explicitly appear in the book of Exodus to express the love of God, however they are implicit in it.⁴⁹ These concepts are explicitly elaborated further in Leviticus and the deuteronomic tradition from which, alongside the exodus tradition, other books of the OT have their allusions.

⁴⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 264-265.

⁴⁷ Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel*, 191.

⁴⁸ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 414.

⁴⁹ *’āhab* for instance occurs twice in Exodus 20:6 and 21:5. The former refers to the nature of God as loving and the latter refers to a slave-master relationship. *bāhar* is attested twice in Exodus 17:9 and 18:25, nevertheless they do not reflect the choice of Israel. *hāshaq* appears thrice in Exodus 27:17; 38:17 and 38:28 but it does not refer to the love of God.

The first one, *'āhab*, occurs only twice in the book of Exodus in 20:6 and 21:5. In its first occurrence as לְאֹהֲבָי “to those loving me,” it is found in the Decalogue describing the nature of God to those who love and obey him. In this text, those who love YHWH experience his *hesed* “loving-kindness.” The second one occurring in Exodus 21:6 in the law concerning slaves is in reference to human love. There are however some textual allusions to the exodus event such as Isaiah 43:3-4; Jeremiah 31:3 and Hosea 11:1 that use the verb *'āhab* to develop the theme of God’s love for Israel with reference to the redemption of Israel from Egypt.⁵⁰

The second term, *bāhar*, is attested twice in the book of Exodus, in 17:9 and 18:25, but not in reference to the choice of Israel by God. It is however the *leitwort* in the deuteronomic tradition in expounding the election of Israel. It is also attested in Isaiah 14:1; 44:1-2; 49:7 and Ezekiel 20:5 making reference to the election and choice of Israel. The third term, *hāshaq*, which is synonymous with *'āhab*, is attested three times in Exodus in 27:17; 38:17 and 38:28 with none of them having reference to God’s love for Israel. Nonetheless, it occurs in Deuteronomy 7:7; 10:15 and 21:11, with the first two concerning God’s love for Israel and making reference to the reason for the choice of Israel. *'āhab* is used with God as the subject to imply his election of Israel in entering into a love relationship with him.⁵¹

In the theophanic narrative in Exodus 3 in which God reveals his name to Moses, God made his intention known to Moses to deliver the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt in verses 7-10. The *Hiphil* infinitive form לְהַצִּילֹם “to deliver” of *nzl*, meaning to snatch, which in principle implied taking something from someone with force, is used as the purpose of God’s coming down to deliver them from the Egyptians. The datival clause מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם “from the hand of the Egyptians” indicates from whom YHWH was supposed to snatch. The use of *nzl* in this context thus implies, illustratively, that YHWH snatches the Israelites from the claws (bondage) of the Egyptian authority.

⁵⁰ Carsten Vang, "God's Love according to Hosea and Deuteronomy: A Prophetic Reworking of a Deuteronomic Concept?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 62, no. 2 (2011): 173-194, 173-174.

⁵¹ Vang, "God's Love according to Hosea and Deuteronomy", 182.

5. Covenant Obedience: Determinant of Israel's Relationship with YHWH

Covenant obedience implies Israel's commitment to consent its will to the will of God through the true observance of the commandments attached to the covenant. As a result of Israel's election through the redemptive act of God, Israel was obliged to obey his commandments to maintain the covenant. YHWH's redemptive love in Exodus revolves around the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt, from the hand of Pharaoh as discussed above. YHWH freely took the initiative to make Israel his elect and entered into a covenant with them.⁵² Accepting and remaining faithful to the covenant were to be a sign of gratitude of Israel to God for his redemptive love in redeeming them from the oppression in Egypt.⁵³

It was required on the part of Israel as its obligation to remain obedient to the covenant in its relationship to God as the OT affirms. This is further elaborated by Moberly as he declares that

Israel's wonder at YHWH's electing love will make most sense if it leads to Israel's entering more fully into covenant obedience...It is important to emphasise that election expresses YHWH's love for Israel.⁵⁴

These statements imply that the election of Israel depicted YHWH's love for Israel and this becomes meaningful when Israel obeys the covenant that YHWH made with them. The love of God is exhibited in his redemptive act for Israel. Thus the redemptive love of God became the ground for Israel to obey him. In this regard, "stipulations of total obedience to God were attached in the form of commandments (Exod 20:1-17//Deut 5:6-21) and law codes (Exod 20:22-23:33, Covenant Code)" to the relationship between God and Israel.⁵⁵

Obedience motif plays a significant role in the biblical narratives and it is an essential requirement that points to the relationship of God to his people.⁵⁶ Obedience to divine

⁵² Spreafico, *Il libro dell'Esodo*. Roma, 10.

⁵³ Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 406.

⁵⁴ R. W. L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 45-46.

⁵⁵ Robert A. Bennett, *Zephaniah*. Vol. V, in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*, edited by Leander E. Keck, 787-826. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 801.

⁵⁶ Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 601-602.

will “function as the exclusive (normative) moral discourse within the Hebrew Bible” being the “the most prevalent basis for ethical reasoning.”⁵⁷ The mighty acts and wonders of YHWH that accompanied the deliverance of Israel from Egypt became a point of reference in his commandments. Out of love, God made a covenant with them and as depicted by the covenant formula in Exodus 19:5, in obeying the covenant they became God’s people and he became their God. The commandments were connected to God’s acts.⁵⁸ The obedience of the people of Israel to YHWH and his commandments was to be the expected response to the covenant YHWH made with them, since “YHWH’s authority that obligates his followers stands behind the Decalogue and the law.”⁵⁹ It became the standard by which their future relationship was to be determined. God’s redemptive love for Israel was thus to be reciprocated by the obedience of Israel to the covenant.

YHWH’s relationship to Israel was expressed in a father-son relationship.⁶⁰ This relationship was established through the act of redemption. YHWH became their redeemer and father through the redemption from slavery in Egypt.⁶¹ This relationship needed to be maintained between YHWH and the people of Israel. The law that was given to Israel through Moses regulated this relationship.⁶² The book of Exodus consequently contains prescribed instructions and commandments that the Israelites were to obey. Hence, for Israel to maintain this relationship of love with their God, they needed to obey the law, which was given by God, out of his will, as the stipulations of the covenant.

Obedience and its cognates are expressed in the OT with the verb שָׁמָע “*shāma*” meaning “hear” and the preposition *le* “to” with *qol* “voice” in different forms as occurring in Genesis 3:17 in the fall narrative, Judges 2:20 in the narrative on Israel’s infidelity and Exodus 15:26 during Israel’s complaint at Marah.⁶³ It can also go along

⁵⁷ Joseph Ryan Kelly, "Orders of Discourse and the Function of Obedience in the Hebrew Bible." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 1 (April 2013): 1-24, 2-3.

⁵⁸ Schmidt, *The Faith of the Old Testament*, 34.

⁵⁹ Kelly, "Orders of Discourse and the Function of Obedience in the Hebrew Bible", 4.

⁶⁰ Svetlana Knobnya, "God the Father in the Old Testament." *European Journal of Theology* 20, no. 2 (2011): 139-148, 139-140.

⁶¹ Knobnya, "God the Father in the Old Testament", 139-140.

⁶² Spreafico, *Il libro dell'Esodo*, 10.

⁶³ Brown, Driver and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1034.

with *dābār* “word” and its associated forms as the accusative to imply obedience.⁶⁴ The fourth section of the book of Exodus, according to the structure provided above, narrates Israel’s obligation and response to God’s redemptive love. In this section, we have the narrative on the covenant that God made with Israel and its requirements on the part of Israel.

The theme of Israel’s required obedient response to the covenant in Exodus is expressed through the use of *shāma*, which occurs with the prepositions *le* and *be* with the noun *qol* (לֵב) in reference to Pharaoh hardening his heart and not listening to Moses and Aaron in Exodus 5:2. It is used in reference to Jethro, asking Moses to heed to his counsel in Exodus 18:19-24. Similarly *shāma* is used in Exodus 23:21-22, in the context of God sending his angels and asking the Israelites to obey them. The texts that point to obedience as the required response of Israel to God’s redemptive love are Exodus 19:1-8 and 24:7. These are the only two proof texts in Exodus whereby *shāma* is accompanied by the preposition *le* and *qol* in a genitival relationship with God. The former calls on the Israelites to obey God and his commandments whereas the latter is used indirectly in a different formulation but by implication referring to Israel consenting to obey God.

In Exodus 24:7; the people of Israel declare their consent to obey the commandments of God, whereas Exodus 19:5 was a message given to them to consent. In other words, Exodus 19:5 was a conditional statement, which did not actually give the affirmation of their response. Exodus 24:7, however, is a declaration of the people to obey the covenant and the commandments of YHWH. Exodus 19-24 concerns the covenant that God made with Israel and the stipulations attached to it. Exodus 19:6 and 24:7 form an inclusion of the whole block of narratives. In their response in Exodus 24:7, “they said ‘all that the Lord had said we will do and we will obey’,” Israel declares and accepts the responsibility to obey God. Hence, by their free consent through the declaration of obedience to YHWH, the Israelites seal their relationship with God.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Brown, Driver and Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1034.

⁶⁵ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical*, 407.

Exodus 19:5 is put in a conditional statement. The first clause which begins with אִם־יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי has *im* (if) signalling the beginning of a conditional statement. Here, Israel is being asked to freely obey God with the condition that they will become his treasured possession, *segulla*. The preceding clauses in Exodus 19:4 become the premises on which the statement was made. The verse refers to the incident of the liberation and redemption from Egypt. Israel was a witness to the wonders that YHWH did in Egypt and how he was able to bring them out of Egypt, the basis upon which they were to obey him.⁶⁶ The consent of Israel to the call to obey God is contained in Exodus 19:8, “and all the people answered together and said all that YHWH has said we shall do.” By this declaration, Israel collectively expressed its consent to whatever Moses spoke to them. It was a call for their obedience to YHWH in order to become his special people and a true possession of his.⁶⁷

Routledge is of the view that “covenants have to do with relationship, so there is always a conditional element,” but in the case of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, there is an unconditional element as well and “those to whom the promises are addressed may still cut themselves off from the blessing through disobedience.”⁶⁸ Thus in the Sinaitic covenant which was consistent with the Abrahamic one, the people needed to consent to it through their promise of obedience to ensure their continued relationship with their God, YHWH. Failure to hold on to their promise of obedience to the covenant cut them off from the covenant relationship. This became the determining factor of Israel’s future as the people of YHWH, as witnessed in the OT. Remaining faithful to the Sinaitic covenant through Israel’s obedience to YHWH consequently became very significant in the history and life of Ancient Israel.

The Sinaitic covenant is patterned on the suzerainty covenant of ancient Hittite treaty, which takes place between a suzerain or a superior power and a vassal.⁶⁹ In this form of treaty, the suzerain gives his stipulations to the vassal or “subject power, offering protection in return for loyalty and obedience.”⁷⁰ Obedience or disobedience to the covenant on the part of the vassal called for blessings or sanctions respectively. As it

⁶⁶ Knobnya, "God the Father in the Old Testament", 140.

⁶⁷ Antwi, *The Book of Jonah in the Context of Post-Exilic Theology of Israel*, 260.

⁶⁸ Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 171. Cf. Spreafico, *Il libro dell'Esodo*, 98-99.

⁶⁹ Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 161.

⁷⁰ Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 161.

was in the Ancient Near Eastern treaty, it was YHWH who took the initiative to redeem Israel and made the covenant with them. YHWH, like the suzerain, gave this covenant, which stemmed from his love.⁷¹ Israel as a partner in the covenant was to show appreciation by listening to the voice of YHWH. This obliged Israel to respond in obedience to God.⁷²

Obedience and disobedience to the covenant and their demands are further elaborated in the book of Deuteronomy and the deuteronomistic history.⁷³ Deuteronomy 7:7-16 is a parallel text of Exodus 19:3-8 which reflects God's commitment and Israel's election. In Deuteronomy 7:8, it is attested that Israel's election was as a result of the fact that God loved them and kept his promise to their ancestors and so redeemed them from Egypt. Verses 9-13 puts emphasis on the fact that God keeps his covenant with those who love him and keep his commandments. This attitude of God calls on Israel to love and observe the commandments of God, implying obedience to God.

Commenting on YHWH's originary love for Israel, using deuteronomic texts on the election of Israel, Brueggemann affirms, "the peculiar commitment of Yahweh and the peculiar identity of Israel are offered as grounds from which appeal is made for serious, radical, concrete obedience."⁷⁴ Waltke explains "the covenant defines Israel's uniqueness by its threefold intention, which can only be accomplished by Israel's obedience to the covenant stipulations (19:5-6)."⁷⁵ The threefold intention is that Israel was to be transformed into a special people of YHWH, becoming a kingdom of priests that would mediate YHWH's blessings to the nations and become a holy nation, reflecting God's character through their deeds in the world.⁷⁶

Israel's obedience to the commandments in actual fact reflects the nature and name of YHWH as holy.⁷⁷ By implication, Israel is to attain this threefold intention only through obedience. Their obedience to the covenant would make them unique among all the nations, as implied in Exodus 19:5, and so fulfilling the requirements of the

⁷¹ Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 119.

⁷² Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 420-422.

⁷³ Cf. John C. Endres et al, ed. *Chronicles and Its Synoptic Parallels in Samuel, Kings and Related Biblical Texts*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), xiv.

⁷⁴ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 417.

⁷⁵ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 407.

⁷⁶ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 407.

⁷⁷ Kelly, "Orders of Discourse and the Function of Obedience in the Hebrew Bible", 20.

election.⁷⁸ Exodus 19:5 must however be understood in the context of the preceding verse, which reminds them of their redemption from Egypt. Their obedience is thus colligated to the redemption from the slavery.

Exodus 19:5 begins with the clause *וְעַתָּה אִם-שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי*, “and now if you obey and listen to my voice,” having two logical particles *וְעַתָּה* and *אִם*, making the clause a logical consequence to the preceding verse,⁷⁹ which makes reference to how Israel witnessed what YHWH did for them in bringing them out of bondage in Egypt. Thus, the redemptive love of YHWH manifested in the deliverance from the bondage in Egypt becomes the essential context for Israel to obey the law (*Torah*) and to point to their identity and the nature of their call to be holy and priestly.⁸⁰ The laws concerning the unclean animals in Leviticus 11:1-45 conclude on the note that Israel is to be holy just as God is holy, since he brought them out of the land of Egypt. Israel was called upon to radiate the character of God. Accordingly, Israel was called to be holy, righteous or just in the reflection of the nature of God and corresponding to his character. In that regard, “keeping the law, then, was not an end in itself for Israel, but related to their very reason for existence.”⁸¹

The Ten Commandments begin with reference to the act of God in bringing Israel out of Egypt.⁸² The Decalogue in Exodus 20 begins by referring to God’s redemptive love in the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt. By witnessing the act of liberation from Egypt, the Israelites were to commit themselves to undertake the stipulations of the covenant enshrined in the Decalogue. The stipulations included the love of God and the neighbour. This obligation to love the neighbour enjoins them to care for the poor, widows, and stranger as contained in some sections of the Pentateuch. Their being strangers in Egypt was to be the basis for their love of the stranger.⁸³ That obedience in gratitude to God as their deliverer was to be reflected in and extended to

⁷⁸ Cf. Brueggemann, "Exodus", 400-401.

⁷⁹ Cf. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 578-579.

⁸⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 64-65.

⁸¹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 64.

⁸² Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6.

⁸³ Exodus 22:21; Joseph Ryan Kelly, "Orders of Discourse and the Function of Obedience in the Hebrew Bible." *The Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 1 (April 2013): 1-24, 7.

the love of neighbour. In the laws concerning slaves in Deuteronomy 15:13-17, Israel was being called upon to be generous to the slave who is freed on the basis that Israel was once a slave in Egypt and God redeemed them as seen in Deuteronomy 15:15.

The redemption of Israel becomes the basis of their obedience to the command that YHWH was enjoining on them. In sum, they were to worship YHWH alone and to love the neighbour. Consequently, in Exodus 22:21 and 23:9, the Israelites were called upon not to oppress the sojourner, since they themselves were sojourners in Egypt. Exodus 23:9 puts emphasis on the fact that they know the life experience of the sojourner. In Exodus 29:44-46, in the statement, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם, "I will dwell in the midst," God will dwell among the Israelites as a witness for Israel that God is the one who brought them from Egypt and he is their God.

In the course of time, Israel was not able to fulfill their covenant obligations through obedience. The book of Exodus witnesses to how the Israelites responded to the covenant. Some of the narratives of disobedience are the building of the golden calf in Exodus 32, the murmuring of the Israelites at Massah and Meribah in Exodus 17:1-7, and the complaints against Moses in Exodus 16. In Exodus 32:4, the act of bringing Israel out of Egypt is attributed to the golden calf. Their deliverance is expressed with הֵעֲלִינוּךָ (brought you) the *Hiphil* form of עָלָה used to connote "to bring." This is used in this context in a proclamation attributing the act of liberation from Egypt to the gods. This implies that the Israelites replaced their God whose presence is manifested through his activities among them with that of the idol.⁸⁴ In all these, they received punishment for their actions. However, out of God's love for them they were pardoned through the intercession of Moses.

Some parallel texts which reflect their disobedience are Joshua 24:5-7, 17; Judge 2:1-3, 12; 6:7-10, 13; Hosea 12:9-10; Amos 2:10-11; Jeremiah 7:22-27. The deuteronomistic historians demonstrated how Israel responded to the covenant indicating the consequences of their disobedience and obedience. The prophets came to the scene to warn the Israelites of their disobedience to the covenant and its consequences and thus trying to convince them to return to the obedience to the

⁸⁴ Cf. Frisch, "The Exodus Motif in 1 Kings 1 - 14", 19.

covenant. The deuteronomistic writers indicated that obedience to the covenant brought prosperity and success to Israel, whereas disobedience to the covenant brought disaster.

6. Conclusion

Redemption is a very significant theme in the Bible and it runs through the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. The OT sets the pace for the theme of redemption, which is a free act of God to liberate his people. The book of Exodus is paradigmatic for God's act of redemption in the Bible. God liberated the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt under the cruel rule of the Pharaoh. This act of YHWH was meant to demonstrate his redemptive love for Israel, through which they became his special or treasured people. YHWH cemented his relationship with Israel through the covenant he made with them.

The Decalogue, the commandments, was attached to the covenant as its stipulations, which Israel was to obey in appreciation of God's redemptive love. This redemptive love of YHWH was thus to be responded and reciprocated by Israel through its obedience to the divine will. Israel's redemption became the basis and the reason for its love of God and neighbour. The obedience to the covenant was crucial to the relationship of Ancient Israel to its God and it was to determine the future relationship of God to his people. Nonetheless, the book of Exodus bears witness to Israel's disobedience to the covenant.

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