

REBELLION, PRESENCE, AND COVENANT: A STUDY IN EXODUS 32-34

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Introduction

THE thesis of this paper is that the narrative of Exodus 32-34 is a basic unity, that it is more likely to stem from one original hand than from a number of contributors plus the final redactor, and that the connections and materials of the narrative itself reveal and support such a unity. There is no claim here that difficulties are non-existent--only that a real basic unity inheres in the narrative if it is approached by way of its canonical presentation. This in turn suggests a methodology: that the text is to be approached holistically with a serious attempt to discern an internal consistency if it be there. This is not to rule out the place of (source) analysis; it is to say that analysis has a tendency to begin too soon, and thus not really to "hear" the text. Most of our attention will be focused on literary concerns with some concluding remarks about the theology of the unit.

The Basic Unity of the Narrative

First of all, it is necessary to deal briefly with *the tradition of 32:1-6* which forms the backdrop for all three chapters. It is, of course, rather common to see this tradition taken as a polemic against Jeroboam I's calf worship at Dan and Bethel, the tradition projecting the condemnation backwards in order to denounce it out of the mouth of Moses.¹ But this is open to question. In 1 Kings 12 the cult stems from Jeroboam's initiative, while here

¹ So Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 143; George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968) 185; and Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus* (The Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: CUP, 1972) 206. For Jeroboam, see 1 Kgs 12:26ff.

the groundswell comes from the people. Moreover, if we are intended to see Aaron in the role of Jeroboam, then the representation is truly inept, for Aaron is here a sort of weak and pressured victim, while Jeroboam appears as the strong instigator. A more astute polemic than this would be needed--Aaron would have had to be cast into more of an image of Jeroboam than this.

Some deny that Aaron's role in vv 1b-4 is original; the original picture of vv 5f. shows him to be only a victim of the people's *fait accompli*.² Noth, who takes this view, bases the excision of vv 1b-4 on the idea that vv 21-24, which seek to excuse Aaron, are secondary. Thus his role in vv 1b-4 must be likewise. I feel this misses the intent of vv 21-24 (wholly aside from whether they are original), for rather than excuse Aaron they tend to blast him as a sort of Caspar Milquetoast. There is no need to question the unity of vv 1-6.³

Incidentally, there may be good grounds for following NEB at v 5a in repointing the form *wayyar'* as *wayyira'* (= "then Aaron feared" instead of "when Aaron saw"; NEB follows Syriac; against NEB, I would retain the plural verb of MT in v 4). In this case, the idea would be that when Aaron saw what the people were making of the calf (v 4), he became alarmed and tried to steer the affair back to some semblance of Yahwism by proclaiming a feast to Yahweh for the next day. One could have a diluted if not an orthodox Yahwism.⁴ Now let us consider the larger complex.

² Martin Noth, *Exodus* (OT Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) 244f.

³ B. S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (OT Library; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974) 558f.

⁴ I have not dealt with the historical antecedents of the calf/bull worship here. See, among others, Lloyd R Bailey, "The Golden Calf," *HUCA* 42 (1971) 97-115, and John N. Oswalt, "The Golden Calves and the Egyptian Concept of Deity," *EvQ* 45 (1973) 13-20. Whatever kind of worship this was intended to be, the cultic confession ("these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt," 32:4, 8) with its plural subject and verb (*'eloheyka . . . he'eluka*) shows the writer branded it as idolatry. The plural subject and verb are sometimes thought to fit Jeroboam's two calves more appropriately (1 Kgs 12:28), but this ignores the fact that there was only one at each cult center, thus making the plural no more suitable for 1 Kgs 12 than for Exod 32. On the problem of the

1. *Evidence of structural design supports the unity of chap. 32.*

If one considers the flow of chap. 32 (through v 29) a definite pattern seems to emerge. In tabular form it would look like this:

Idolatry originates, vv 1-6	Idolatry discovered, vv 15-19a
Expression of Yahweh's wrath, vv 7-10	Expression of Moses' wrath, vv 19b-21 (or, 20)
Quest to conciliate God, vv 11-13	Quest to conciliate Moses, vv 22-24
Total judgment restrained, v 14	Partial judgment executed, vv 25-29

Viewed as such the narrative appears to have a thematic, parallel development. Of course this is true only of the extant text. However, a common literary analysis holds the basic narrative to have consisted only of vv 1-6, 15-20, 35,⁵ while vv 7-14 are usually suspected as being Deuteronomistic. This latter point--aside from vv 25-29 (see below)--wipes out three elements of the narrative as depicted in the above table. However, it is only with vv 7-14 that the chapter possesses the symmetry I have attempted to sketch. It might be observed that part of the problem rests with vv 7-8: they are held to be too anticipatory of vv 15ff. as to make Moses' wrath inexplicable since he would have known everything beforehand.⁶ Yet Driver sees no difficulty here: "Moses' anger may naturally have been kindled by the spectacle of the doings in the camp, the full character of which he did not before realize."⁷ Childs would also retain vv 7-8.⁸ Of course, if the extant narrative does possess this structural unity it may simply mean that it has been so arranged by a redactor using his various materials in a skillful

"Jeroboam" and "Aaron" traditions, one would do well to ponder the comments of historian Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (New York: Vintage, 1953) 123f., 130f.

⁵ J. P. Hyatt, *Exodus* (New Century Bible; London: Oliphants, 1971) 301; also Georg Beer, *Exodus* (HAT; Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1939) 153, except for vv 17-18.

⁶ Elias Auerbach, *Moses* (Detroit: Wayne State, 1975) 123.

⁷ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges; Cambridge: The University Press, 1911) 350.

⁸ Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 559.

manner. This is recognized. However, one of the main reasons for dividing the chapter is usually its alleged lack of unity (see most commentaries). It is the latter which is being questioned here.

There is another manner in which the narrative may be viewed which may indicate a conscious unity behind it. This pattern centers around the sequence in which key persons and items are introduced. It may be set out as follows:

- People rebelling, v 1
- Aaron's role, vv 2ff.
- Calf produced, v 4
- Two tablets intact, vv 15-16
- Two tablets broken, v 19
- Calf destroyed. v 20
- Anger at Aaron, vv 21-24
- People judged, vv 25-29

This pattern indicates that the primary elements of the narrative are introduced in a particular order in the first portion of the chapter and then are "picked up" and dealt with in exactly the reverse order in the second half of the chapter. Insofar as this may betray conscious literary design it argues for the unity of the piece.

The key function of vv 15-16 in this scheme should be observed. The full and elaborate description of the tables is necessary and reveals the literary skill of the narrator. This intense dwelling upon the two tables seems meant to underscore the vast privilege of Israel in having this gracious divine deposit; yet at the same time it most effectively conveys to us the sense of utter tragedy, for the reader already knows that the covenant has been bartered away for a bastard bull. Again, this would appear to be literary artistry at its best.

Finally, the effective contrast between the beginning and the end of the main narrative in chap. 32 should be appreciated. In vv 1-6 the people gather (*qhl*) to Aaron, who proves to be a false leader, for rebellion and sin; while in vv 25-29 the Levites gather (*'sp*) to Moses, the true leader, for Yahweh and in order to execute judgment on sin. Thus there is set up a vivid contrast between "the true congregation" and the false one. The contrast may

mean that vv 25-29 are as "original" as vv 1-6, an anathema to most commentators.

However, with vv 25-29 the question arises as to whether this tradition does not owe its existence to a time when the rights of Levites were being questioned, so that these verses then constitute a levitical apology in face of some need. Obviously the shadow of Jeroboam again casts itself upon the passage, for he clearly excluded Levites from being priests in his royal sanctuaries (1 Kgs 12:31). Is this tradition then meant to justify the levitical claim to priestly office?⁹ Not necessarily. If one can put some stock in the tradition of 2 Chr 11:13-17 (also 13:8ff.), the primary response of the priests and Levites was not to argue for their rights but to emigrate to Judah. Moreover, it is just as possible that a tradition like vv 25-29 may explain why Jeroboam did not want the likes of the Levites around--they weren't the type that cooperated with new religious deals.

2. The coherence and progression in Moses' intercession binds all three chapters together.

For purposes of discussion, Moses' intercession will be divided into the following rough segments: 32:9-14, 32:30-34, 33:12-17, 33:18-23, 34:5-10a. The first section, 32:9-14, begins with Yahweh's announcing his intention totally to consume (Piel of *klh*) the people and begin all over with Moses (vv 9-10). However, after Moses' reasoned and impassioned plea, we read that "Yahweh repented about the punishment [lit., evil] which he had thought of bringing on his people (v 14). Please note: there is *not one word about forgiveness* in this section. The only success with which Moses' intercession meets is Yahweh's withdrawal of threatened total extinction. The text itself gives no ground whatever for inferring any idea of forgiveness or restoration to favor. Such must be read into the text, and commentators commonly do just that as can be seen via their comparisons of this section with 32:30ff.¹⁰ The two sections are not in parallelism (not doublets) but in progression, 32:9-14 only dealing with the turning away of Yahweh's immediate and totally consuming wrath.

In 32:30-34 Moses does plead for Israel's forgiveness even to

⁹ See Noth, *Exodus*, 250f.

¹⁰ Thus Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 560, 571; Hyatt, *Exodus*, 303.

the degree of losing his own life if such forgiveness cannot be obtained. And his plea is rejected! Forgiveness is at the least delayed; it is not yet granted. However, the theme of 32:13 is picked up in v 34. Thus the idea probably is that Yahweh, who must be true to his word, will then fulfill the covenant promise which Moses had pleaded in 32:13, albeit in a "distant" manner (see below). Moreover, although the sentence of immediate extinction was withdrawn (32:14), the guilty ones will still meet retribution at some time in the future (vv 33, 34b). The main advance that 32:30-34 makes on 32:9-14 is in Yahweh's assurance of fulfilling the gift of the land to Israel.

The following verses, 33:1-4, expand on what was involved in "my angel will go before you" (32:34).¹¹ Again we hear, "I will send before you an angel" (v 2), and now we understand this as a judgment when we read, "But I will not go up in your midst" (*ki lo' e'eleh beqirbeka*, v 3). Yahweh, then, promises a remote help rather than an intimate presence. The latter is still forfeit; the former is granted in order to fulfill his promise to the patriarchs. The impression received is that Yahweh can only fulfill his "bare" word--the former intimacy is gone. However, even in "lest I consume you along the way" (v 3) there is yet a hint of grace. It is too perilous for Yahweh's presence to accompany them, and thus in mercy he withholds it. Thus the basic problem is twofold and interrelated: Yahweh's presence and Israel's forgiveness.¹²

The next movement in the motif of Moses' intercession occurs in 33:12-17. Moses is evidently dissatisfied with the vagueness of the "angel promise"--"You have not made known to me whom you will send with me" (v 12). However, a new and crucial datum appears in this section: the special standing of Moses.

¹¹ I recognize the grammatical roughness of 33:1-4 in MT. However, this does not obscure the essential meaning. Nor do I apologize for taking 33:1-4 as a harmonious and natural explanation of 32:34. Since all hands acknowledge the extreme difficulty of analysis in chap. 33 (see Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 584), no objection can really be lodged against taking these verses as consistently explicative of 32:34 (so U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967] 425).

¹² Hyatt, *Exodus*, 312-313, sees an inconsistency between Yahweh's not going up among the people in v 3 and his promising to send an angel in v 2. However, this is because Hyatt identifies the angel of v 2 with that of 23:20ff.

That Moses uses the first person in v 13 shows beyond a doubt that the "I know you by name and, furthermore, you have found favor in my eyes" in v 12 was limited to Moses. That is, the second person singular in v 12 was not corporate (the people) but personal (Moses). Moses seeks for fuller explication of God's ways, attaching to his plea a hint of his desire to include the whole people with himself in the hoped-for answer ("consider that this nation is your people," v 13). Whether v 14 is taken as a question ("Shall my face go with you?") or as a statement is of little immediate concern.¹³ Moses latches on to this necessity of Yahweh's personal presence in vv 15-16 as the *sine qua non* of Israel's existence. But what is especially significant is Moses' tenacious way of seeking to include the people with himself as, objects of Yahweh's favor, as his insistent "I and your people" (twice) in v 16 reveals. Moses contends that it is in Yahweh's "going with us" that they are unique among nations. Yahweh's response in v 17 seems to show that he has granted Moses' plea, because Yahweh views Israel's representative with favor. There is still no explicit word about forgiveness. That it would be implied in the renewed promise of Yahweh's personal presence may well be so, but for the purposes of the narrative it is not yet stated. Even now there remains a certain suspense; the tension has not completely ceased.¹⁴

¹³ I prefer to read 33:14 as a question though it is without the regular interrogative particle. This is not impossible (GKC, sect. 150a), and the text flows more logically if so construed. It is taken interrogatively by Beer, *Exodus*, 158; W. Beyerlin, *Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) 103; and M. Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958) 155. I might say that I am assuming *panim* ("face") to be virtually identical with personal presence. So if Yahweh's face will go with them it means that the verdict of 33:3, 5 has been reversed. This follows Cassuto (*Commentary*, 434), who points to 2 Sam 17: 11 as showing face = person. W. Eichrodt disputes this view (*Theology of the Old Testament* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961-67] 2.37f.) but more on the basis of source division than solid argument--and sources are singularly elusive in Exod 33.

¹⁴ Two additional comments: (i) My treatment of only the successive movements in Moses' intercession makes Yahweh's reversal of his verdict of 33:3 appear abrupt. It should be remembered that at least one, possibly two, "repentance scenes" intervene (33:5-6,7-11), which will be discussed later. (ii) I cannot agree with those who see the crux of vv 12-17 in the

The division or separation of 33:18-23 from the foregoing passage (vv 12-17) is arbitrary to be sure. Yet since it introduces one to the theophany of 34:5ff., I have severed it from its foregoing context in order to consider it now in conjunction with the final segment of Moses' intercession, 34:5-10a.

Yahweh responds to Moses' prayer to see his glory by promising to show Moses his goodness and to proclaim his name, Yahweh, which is related in 34:5-10a. The revelation there given perfectly answers to the concerns which have burdened Moses' prayers hitherto. It is precisely the proclamation of 34:6-7 which Moses and Israel need to hear. At last the covenant breakers are assured of finding forgiveness in this God who "takes away / forgives iniquity and rebellion and sin." In this climactic proclamation the tension is finally relieved. The basic progression in Moses' encounters with Yahweh should be fairly clear. First, total extinction is averted, that and nothing more (32: 9ff.). Next, forgiveness is sought and refused, though a remote kind of help is promised to fulfill the promise of the land (32:30ff.). Then, Yahweh's previous verdict is reversed and his full personal presence is again assured (33:12ff.; but this is only done because Yahweh regards the mediator graciously and not for any merit on the part of the people, v 17). Finally, the forgiveness for which Israel hangs in the balance is offered and declared (34:6ff.). There appears to be a coherent and conscious progression involved.

Further, it may not be amiss to see a special significance here in the proclamation of the name, Yahweh. I do not mean at this point to kindle all the debate that can rage over the derivation of the Tetragrammaton. However, I am reasonably convinced that the most satisfying explanation (because it is based on actual context) of its meaning in Exod 3:14-15 is found by linking it to the preceding *ki 'ehyeh 'immak* ("But I will be with you")

idea that Sinai is regarded as the real place of the divine presence and that what Moses is concerned about is Yahweh's presence with them when they leave Sinai (so Noth, *Exodus*, 257; cf. Clements, *Exodus*, 214). There is no need to see any other problem except that of the narrative context--the rebellion and covenant-breaking of Israel. Moreover, it is clear from 34:5 that Yahweh's presence is not glued to Sinai, for he "comes down" to appear on Sinai. It is simply the place where he manifests himself.

of 3:12. This would indicate that Yahweh is the Present One, the One who is there with his own to act in their behalf as they have need.¹⁵ If this is cogent, the proclamation of Yahweh's name here in 34:6-7 may well be most appropriate to Israel's existential situation posed in the preceding narrative: despite their covenant breaking Yahweh is nevertheless willing again to be the Present One for them, to go with them. Should this be granted, it would nicely fit the problem of the divine presence with which Moses had been grappling.

Both "prongs" of Israel's dilemma are brought together in Moses final prayer of 34:9. This verse ought not to be separated from its context (as Beyerlin, *Origins*, 90ff., does). It fits perfectly with all of the foregoing. The petition, "May my Lord go in our midst" (*yelek na' 'adonai beqirbenu*), is the final plea regarding the "presence problem" and is directly related to the "hard word" of 33:3 (*lo' 'e'eleh beqirbeka*, cf. also 33:5). The second request--"and pardon our iniquities and our sins"--relates to the other aspect of the problem, the solution of which had just been offered in Yahweh's climactic proclamation (vv 6f.). It should be observed that Moses speaks of "our midst," "our iniquities," "our sins." There is real identification with his people. Verse 10a reads naturally as a sequel to Moses' last prayer--"Look! I am cutting a covenant" is the divine response of renewed favor.

This writer then holds that the motif of Moses' intercession forms a unifying thread for these chapters, that it follows a step-by-step pattern to its triumph, and that it betrays conscious literary design. It is Moses' version of Jacob's wrestling: 'I will not let you go until you bless your people.'

3. *The sections about the ornaments and about the tent of meeting (33:4-6 and 33:7-11) consistently fit their niche in the narrative as repentance and Judgment motifs.*

These sections are most problematical and puzzling in one sense. The purpose here is not to untie all the critical knots but to suggest that these sections do make relatively good sense in

¹⁵ See Morris S. Seale, *The Desert Bible* (New York: St. Martin's, 1974) 154-156. See too M. Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus* (New York: Behrman House, 1969) 81f., and K.-H. Bernhardt, "Hayah," TDOT 3. 380-381.

the narrative sequence where they are now placed. In the "ornaments" section, v 4 suggests a spontaneous laying aside of this jewelry in response to Yahweh's "evil" word refusing his presence in their midst, while vv 5-6 specify a permanent custom imposed by Yahweh. At any rate, the main idea seems to be one of grief, and repentance, which stands appropriately here.¹⁶ How does the tent of meeting section function within the narrative? Basically, we contend, as a judgment motif in the face of Israel's forfeiture of Yahweh's presence. Though vv 7-11 may appear as a kind of "floating" passage, it is nevertheless grounded in the context. It paints an immediate contrast to the action of the people in vv 4-6, since in its opening phrase, "And Moses took" (*umoseh yiqqah*), the position of the subject before the verb form "expresses antithesis or marks a parallelism with the action of another subject."¹⁷ Thus while the people are stripping off their ornaments in mourning the loss of Yahweh's presence, Moses, on his part, pitches the tent of communion outside the camp where he will experience Yahweh's presence. The fact that the tent of communion is now placed outside the camp serves as a visible parable of Israel's predicament--the loss of Yahweh's presence.¹⁸ He cannot dwell in their midst, precisely as he had said (33: 3). So there is a stark contrast between the people and Moses: Yahweh will commune with him, even "face to face" as one speaks intimately with his friend (v 11). Moses is distinctly set apart from the people,¹⁹ a distinction that is clearly presup-

¹⁶ Some scholars (e.g., Beer, *Exodus*, 157) assume that there must have been an account of the making of the ark here originally (i.e., that's what the ornaments were used for), which has subsequently dropped out. This is to argue from utter silence and without any hard evidence.

¹⁷ Cassuto, *Commentary*, 430.

¹⁸ George Bush, *Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Exodus* (Andover: Gould & Newman, 1841) 2.229-230. The question of the "tent of meeting" (*'ohel mo'ed*) is beyond the proper scope of this paper. Certainly the tent of meeting here (vv 7-11) is not to be identified with that of the tabernacle (27:21ff. passim). Many, link 33:7-11 with Num 11:16-17, 24, 26; 12:5, 10; and Deut 31:14-15 and see in these an alternate tradition to that of P's tabernacle, viz., one that knew of a simpler structure outside the camp; see, e.g., G. Henton Davies, "Tabernacle," IDB 4.502. However, a close reading of these additional texts (Num 11, etc.) indicates that there is no insurmountable problem in identifying their *'ohel mo'ed* with (P's) tabernacle.

¹⁹ Buber, *Moses*, 153-154, draws attention to the fact that in 33:7 Moses

posed in his intercession that follows (33:12ff., see above). It is as if he alone yet stands in covenant with Yahweh.²⁰ Observe that in 34:3 only Moses the mediator is to be involved in the covenant renewal.

4. *The covenant (renewal) of 34:10-28 most suitably relates to the preceding narrative in its contents as well as its context.*

The covenant of 34:10ff. cannot be discussed without reference to 34:1-9. Initially there appears to be a critical consensus about chap. 34. Though it is customarily recognized as a covenant renewal within its present textual form, it is common for scholars to excise the two references to the "first" covenant tablets in v 1, the similar reference in v 4, and the "ten words" clause of v 28b, and then to view it as J's counterpart to E's Sinai covenant.²¹ How to explain chap. 34 then becomes the task, and it is at this point that the apparently solid phalanx of opinion scatters in radically different directions.²² This writer is not contending that such disparity of opinion is necessarily a support for the view that will be argued here. He does contend that such diversity at least suggests that a consideration of the obvious (the canonical context as primary rather than secondary) is a valid option. Indeed, the unwillingness of most to allow chap. 34 to be a genuine covenant renewal is a little mystifying. Though it is a truism, it is worth pointing out that those who refuse to see a covenant renewal here must purge the evidence which opposes them if taken as it stands. One may be accustomed to such procedure, but it should be remembered that it is most suspect in principle.

pitched the tent "for himself" (*lo*).

²⁰ So J. H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (2nd ed.; London: Soncino Press, 1960) 361. The verbs of 33:7ff. are usually construed as "frequentive" (= "used to"), being determined by the initial imperfect *yiqqah*. I have no objection to this, though, as Cassuto (*Commentary*, 429-430) has well observed, *weqara'* (called/named) hardly fits a frequentive pattern. Cassuto would also exclude *yiqqah* (took) and *wenatah* (pitched) from the frequentive category. Possibly we are to understand vv 7ff. as a practice initiated" in the situation depicted and continued thereafter (much like the relation between v 4 and vv 5-6).

²¹ Hyatt, *Exodus*, 318, 322; Clements, *Exodus*, 220£., but seemingly retaining "ten words"; Beer, *Exodus*, 159£.; also Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 607.

²² Cf. Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 604-607, for an excellent survey.

Perhaps it is at least fair to ask whether the necessity (?) to see chap. 34 as J's version of the Sinai covenant is not a desperate attempt to save J from a culpable omission in his materials or oneself from re-examining tenets of one's critical orthodoxy.²³

In considering 34:10-28, I intend to approach it primarily in terms of its contents rather than its form (covenant-treaty? legal code?), though the latter is certainly not without its interest. Observe that the primary demand running through vv 12-17 is for total loyalty to Yahweh. This section emphatically underscores the peril of pagan idolatry, warning of its seductions, glowing in the white heat of a God whose name is Jealous. No more suitable covenant demand could be made on the former bull worshipers. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in all of vv 10-28 there is not one word about the relationships between Israelite and Israelite, as in Exodus 21-23. Nor is this silence at all astounding if the real burden of this covenant was to address Israel's existential situation as it existed in the wake of 32:1-6, the very connection implicit throughout the extant text. In fact, this is precisely the rationale behind the prohibition of "molten gods" (*'elohe massekah*) in v 17--it must be a clear broadside to the "molten bull-calf" (*'egel massekah*) of 32:4. To wonder why only molten gods are mentioned here and find it rather inexplicable²⁴ is to have missed what the canonical context itself supplies.

At v 18 the emphasis shifts toward cultic matters, in which mention of the main feasts is prominent (vv 18, 22f., 25f.). Nor does this seem coincidental. Rather, the delineation of Yahweh's proper feasts serves as a splendid antithesis to Aaron's sorry excuse for a "feast to Yahweh" in 32:5. It is a way of setting

²³ On chap. 34 Hyatt (*Exodus*, 318) states that there is "little indication that this is in fact a renewal" apart from the notations of it in vv 1, 4. Actually, however, this amounts to saying that there is little indication of renewal here apart from the fact that the text does say just that. I must beg pardon if this sounds too polemical, but it causes one logical anguish to see the invocation of a later redactor for whatever elements do not fit the predominant theory--seemingly without serious consideration of at least the possibility of the integrity of the extant text. See K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 41-42, for one who seems to retain the renewal idea here, even though he too favors taking the renewal phrases of vv 1, 4 as redactional.

²⁴ As do Hyatt, *Exodus*, 324, and Noth, *Exodus*, 263.

it, the true cult over against the bull cult. In this view the concentration on ritual matters is really no surprise. To have the decalogue of chap. 20 here would have been irrelevant to what had just transpired. The stress, therefore, on proper cultic practice in this kind of setting is merely another way of seeking to enforce that undeviating loyalty to Yahweh demanded in vv 12-17.

Finally, a suggestion might be entered regarding v 27 in which Yahweh is addressing Moses. The last words of the verse read: "I have cut with you a covenant and with Israel" (*karatti 'itteka berit we'et yisra'el*). It is common to regard "and with Israel" as a later addition to the text,²⁵ and one can see how this could be assumed since *we'et yisra'el* stands rather isolated at the end of the clause, being severed from its coordinate *'itteka* by the intervening object *berit*. However, I would propose that *we'et yisra'el* is deliberately elliptical in order to be pointedly dramatic. It then artistically rounds off the whole burden of the preceding chapters, especially in regard to Moses' intercession.²⁶ It would fit link up beautifully with the "I and your people" concern of Moses in 33:12-17 (see above). It is the gracious Jealous One uttering the climactic assurance of pardon for which Moses had pleaded.²⁷

²⁵ See, e.g., Beyerlin, *Origins*, 78.

²⁶ Note how the last phrase ("the king of Assyria") of Isa 7:17 is "dropped" for effect at the very end of the Hebrew construction; see E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72) 1.295.

²⁷ Space prohibits any lengthy discussion of individual elements in 34:10-28, especially of some which may be regarded as late (e.g., D redactor in vv 11-16, 24, according to Hyatt, *Exodus*, 319). These brief notes must suffice. (i) On vv 11b-13 one might note the sense of imminent anticipation it reflects; there is no hint of Israel's having endured the battering of the wilderness wanderings. This proves nothing. Yet it does indicate that the piece authentically portrays Israel's situation in terms of their history in the given text. If it is a backward projection it is well done. (ii) Verse 24 must be quite early (contra Noth, *Exodus*, 264; Hyatt, *Exodus*, 325), as one could hardly imagine such an ideal view emerging amidst post-conquest or post-settlement realities; nor could one expect much extending of borders in 7th century Judah. (iii) The "house of Yahweh your God," v 26 (cf. v 24c), does not necessarily point to D. In the ancient world it would simply be assumed that a god would have a house. The contrary would be strange. (iv) One might also note that the prohibition of v 26b (boiling a kid in its mother's milk) evidently refers to a pagan ritual practice

I have tried to sketch what appears to me as a transparent and virile linkage between ch. 34 and its preceding context. It is held that this perspective more satisfactorily accounts for the problems involved, and, if accepted, it means that ch. 34 should be allowed to stand as a true covenant renewal.

5. The veil tradition (34:29-35) forms a connected and meaningful conclusion to the narrative complex.

Literary analysis tends to assign this little piece to P²⁸ while tradition analysis understands it as an attempt to explain Moses' veil, pointing to the analogy of the priest's mask in ancient religion.²⁹ These matters are not the main concern now.

These verses are not as unconnected as they may appear at first sight. Instead their primary emphasis well relates to the preceding account of Moses' receiving the covenant on Sinai. Cassuto observes that the text refers three times to Moses' speaking to Yahweh (vv 29, 34, 35), three times to Moses' speaking with Israel (vv 31, 33, 34), and once to Yahweh's speaking to Moses (v 32)--seven times in all. Such an emphasis hardly seems accidental.³⁰ At any rate, it makes for a firm link to the foregoing covenant renewal and is concerned with the communication of that revelation to Israel, though it is also cognizant of Moses' passing on future revelation as well (vv 34-35).

Could there be more than this intended, particularly in reference to Moses' veil? I would propose the possibility of both a positive and negative function of the veil in light of the preceding canonical context. The fact that Israel sees Moses' face while he is speaking Yahweh's word to them would suggest their restoration to covenant favor. It was precisely the light of Yahweh's

(Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 485-486; d. P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 232-233). It too would be a stipulation meant to promote and insure sole allegiance to Yahweh.

²⁸ Beer, *Exodus*, 13, 159; Hyatt, *Exodus*, 326.

²⁹ Noth, *Exodus*, 267; Clements, *Exodus*, 225. Note that, according to the text (vv 33, 35), Moses was unveiled when speaking to the people and only veiled himself after he had communicated Yahweh's word to them. The veil was not worn when Moses was addressing the people as Clements, for one, appears to suppose. This seems then to be a strange function for a priestly mask; maybe Moses' veil was only a veil.

³⁰ Cassuto, *Commentary*, 451.

presence they had bartered away and from which they had been excluded. Now they possessed a clear sign of renewed acceptance, viz., the radiance of Yahweh's glory reflected from Moses' face. Yahweh's word was thus accompanied by a kind of assuring "sacrament."

Yet there is also a negative touch, for after Moses would convey Yahweh's word to them he would place the veil over his face. Is it stretching the matter to view this action as a visual aid meant to remind Israel of their nearly fatal apostasy, a kind of "caution light" intended to lead them to ever fresh repentance? Thus the covering of the radiance would symbolize for them the catastrophe of rebellion. The significance of the veil then would be a dual one; it would serve as both a true comfort and a needed check. Should this suggestion be valid, these verses would form a most suitable capstone to the whole narrative edifice.

The purpose of this major section has been to furnish evidence for taking Exodus 32-34 as an essential unity. It should be said that this in itself does not decide date(s) and/or writer(s). Its main concern is the integrity of the narrative. The unity of a narrative could be imposed by a redactor far down on the literary time-line. The matter can be involved. I personally incline toward seeing but one hand behind a well-constructed, unitary narrative. The work of a committee is not likely to achieve such a standard --much less if the committee's work extends over long reaches of time.

Concluding Theological Footnotes

Though the literary question is the primary focus of this study, it is proper to conclude by indicating certain theological themes which these chapters underscore. Indeed my conviction is that until one views this material as a literary totality he will have no feeling for its theological potency (i.e., as a general principle: only sane and sympathetic criticism can yield rich biblical theology).

One theme centers around the rebellion of the people. This note is obviously rooted in the basic event of 32:1-6 and is emphatically underscored when Israel is described four times as "a people stiff of neck" (*'am qeseh 'orep*; 32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9; this exact phrase is found only two other times, Deut 9:6, 13, both of which

are in a context where the event of Exodus 32ff. is being re-counted). And such rebellion is costly: in all of chaps. 32-34 Yahweh never calls Israel his people (not even in 34:10).³¹ If anything, they are Moses' people (32:7; 33:1; 34:10). The ornament section (33:4-6) and the veil tradition (34:29-35; see above) indicate that Israel was to remember her rebellion, to keep it always before her in order to live in repentance and true humility, to realize that the proper decor for the people of God is sackcloth and ashes.

A second theme is the *cruciality of a mediator* or, in traditional terms, *the greatness of Moses*. This theme pervades the passage and was highlighted in the discussion of his intercession. It is Moses who "brought us up out of the land of Egypt" (32:1), of whom Yahweh promises to make a great nation (32:10), who intercedes repeatedly, persistently, and successfully, who has authority to "dress down" Aaron (32:21ff.), with whom Yahweh speaks "face to face" (33:11), who requests a view of Yahweh's glory and is granted a theophany (33:18ff.), who reflects Yahweh's glory with radiant face (34:29ff.). Yet the greatness of Moses is also seen in his humiliation: he rejects the offer to become covenant father (32:10) and "empties himself" to share the covenant curse (32:32). However, it is especially with respect to the intercession motif that one could say that Moses is so crucial that Israel's destiny hangs on his girdle. This does not suggest some "merits of Moses" idea³² but does try to take account of him as covenant mediator and as evidently the only Israelite still in covenant fellowship with God and unstained by the smear of apostasy. Yet it must be noted that even Moses has perimeters that limit him. He cannot see the "bare" glory of Yahweh (33:20), and, though he ever remains the bold and adventurous supplicant, he nevertheless remains a supplicant.³³ Here we see but a forerunner of the One Mediator.

³¹ The word *'am* (referring to Israel) is used 33 times in chaps. 32-34; 9 times in the mouth of Yahweh, 9 times in the mouth of Moses (*he* is the one who calls them "thy [Yahweh's] people"), once by Aaron, and 14 times by the narrator.

³² The narrative grounds forgiveness not in the merits of Moses (32:33) but in the mercy of Yahweh (33:19; 34:6-7).

³³ The first chapter of John seems to pick up on this idea of Moses' limits in Exodus 33-34 and to draw some contrasts between Moses and

The grace of Yahweh is a third emphasis. Surely, the centrality of 34: 6-7 ought to be recognized in such a connection. But the process should be observed as well as the climax (which is why the whole text must be held together). The long, arduous labor of the intercessor, the depicting of the restoration to favor in a progressive but deliberate pattern--this stresses more graphically than any mere statement that Yahweh's grace is not cheap grace! He is not the easy-going, grandfather god of the popular lyrics who "though it makes him sad to see the way we live, he'll always say, 'I forgive.'" There is more tension than that in the God whose name is Jealous! His grace is abundant and profound; but whatever it is, it is not softness. These chapters skillfully present to us the necessary tension in the God who is both loving and just, both gracious and holy. They do not explain how Yahweh's grace and holiness kiss each other, but they do preach grace in such a way that we both fear Yahweh's wrath yet rejoice --with trembling--under his unexplainable grace.

Finally, there is a theology of revelation implicit in our material. Yahweh speaks with Moses "face to face" (33:11) yet that does not dispense with the necessity of the cloud (33:9-10). Yahweh's servant may look upon what glory is given him to see, but he is yet shielded from seeing anything more than the "after effects" (33:18ff.; contrast John 1:18b!)--while the sinful people can scarcely tolerate a reflected glory (34: 30). Thereby one understands that here is a God who may be intensely intimate yet elusively invisible. The former should answer the deepest needs of his people; the latter should keep them from going around making calves.

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both the Logos and believers in the Logos; I have worked out some of these parallels/contrasts in an unpublished paper, "A Greater Than Moses: Old Testament Background in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel (1980).

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