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# God, Pharaoh and Moses

Explaining the Lord's Actions in the Exodus Plagues Narrative

William A. Ford


Foreword by R. W. L. Moberly

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## Chapter 1

# The Issue and the Approach

### 1.1 The Issue under Discussion

The story of the exodus is primarily a story about YHWH.<sup>1</sup>

The exodus is often seen as a story about the liberation of Israel. Yet Israel are absent from the action in most of the story.<sup>2</sup> They may form the basis of Moses' commission and the demand to Pharaoh, but they play little active part in the story, in contrast to many other Old Testament stories. Moses, and to a lesser extent Aaron, has a greater role. His story begins in Ex. 2, and he is present at nearly every point after that until the end of the exodus in Ex. 15.<sup>3</sup> However, while he is present, it is as the one spoken to by YHWH, or as the one who speaks the word of YHWH. Apart from this role, little is said about him. In the same way, Pharaoh is present as the one who is addressed by YHWH and who refuses his demands during the plagues. Like Moses, he is one who is important inasmuch as he encounters YHWH. This does not mean that these others are unimportant. The fact that YHWH works with and through human beings will be considered throughout this examination. However, the prime focus in the text is YHWH.

Inasmuch as this story is part of the Old Testament, the fact that it focuses upon YHWH may not be surprising. However there are a couple of notable points concerning the story in relation to YHWH. First it is almost

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. James Plastaras, *The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1966), henceforth 'Plastaras', 2; Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), henceforth 'Sarna Exodus', xiii; William Johnstone, 'Exodus', in John W. Rogerson, R. W. L. Moberly and William Johnstone, *Genesis and Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 182-276, henceforth 'Johnstone Exodus OTC', 183, 205; George F. A. Knight, *Theology as Narrative: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1976), henceforth 'Knight', 8; Laurel A. Dykstra, *Set Them Free – The other side of Exodus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), henceforth 'Dykstra', 95, 115; Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War. Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), henceforth 'Dozeman', 5.

<sup>2</sup> They are present in chapters 1, 5, and 12-15, as well as very briefly in chapters 2, 4, and 6.

<sup>3</sup> In this dissertation, due to the number of references to Exodus, all references will be given without the 'Ex.' prefix, unless stated. Thus Exodus 5:1 will be cited as '5:1' and so forth. Other biblical references will retain their prefix.