

# Theophany on Sinai

*Amy B. Hardison*

Mount Sinai looms large in the theological landscape of the Old Testament. It is “the mountain of God” (Exodus 3:1) and the first Israelite sanctuary.<sup>1</sup> It is where the law is revealed and where an incipient nation is set apart to God. It is where Moses enters into the presence of God, not once, but on at least three different occasions.<sup>2</sup> In Old Testament thought, bringing corruptible, consumable flesh into the presence of a being whose very essence is infinite glory, perfection, and holiness is imbued with danger. A mere mortal who attempts this must first engage in gestures of approach, religious acts that purify and prepare. However, ritual and spiritual preparation alone do not qualify one to enter into the presence of God. Theophanies are not gratuitous. They have purpose—a prophet is called, truth is revealed, a person is endowed with the power of God. Thus, theophanies transform. Having encountered the Divine, the person is never—or should never be—the same.

This paper will explore the three different theophanies that occur on Sinai: the commissioning call of Moses (Exodus 3–4), the establishment of the Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19–20, 24), and the renewal of the covenant after the rebellion

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*Amy B. Hardison is an independent scholar in Mesa, Arizona.*

of the golden calf (Exodus 32–34). In particular, we will examine the rituals of approach and the ritual responses that accompany these theophanies, the ensuing transformation, and the revelation of the nature of God.

### Moses' Commission (Exodus 3–4)

Moses' first encounter with God begins nondescriptly. He is simply doing what he has probably done many times in his forty years of shepherding, leading Jethro's flock into the remote pasturelands on the far side of Sinai. This time, however, "the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush" (Exodus 3:2). In the Old Testament, the phrase "angel of the Lord" often refers to a "manifestation of God that is visible to the human eye."<sup>3</sup> The phrase "in a flame of fire" suggests that the Lord appears with the ineffable brilliance of celestial glory that is often described as fire.

God calls Moses by name, and Moses responds with the Hebrew idiom of readiness, "Here am I" (Exodus 3:4). In spite of this answer, Moses is not ready to enter into the presence of God. "Draw not nigh hither," God commands. "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses has been tramping through the dusty, dirty wilderness. Undoubtedly, the impurities of the world adhere to his sandals. It goes without saying that "one should not track dirt into God's house."<sup>4</sup> However, purity of the sole is not nearly as important as purity of the soul. The act is primarily symbolic. It is a gesture of approach that represents the ritual cleansing that must occur before one enters into the presence of God. At the same time, because only people of means wore sandals in Egypt and Israel, when Moses removes his sandals he demonstrates deference and humility.

Moses reacts to the appearance of God with the typical Old Testament response: fear. Too frightened to look upon God, he hides his face. While Moses cowers, God speaks; in doing so, God reveals himself. "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:7–8). By this statement, God reveals that he is not a remote God dispassionately observing earthlings. God sees. He listens. He knows. He comes down (an idiom for describing divine intervention in human affairs).<sup>5</sup> He delivers. And he brings them into a spacious and bountiful land.

This is a God who cares deeply, who responds to calls of distress and anguish, but not prematurely. This is a God who desires to bless and bestow abundance and above all to take his people out of the world and bring them unto himself, where they may rest in him.

Listening to this being of unimaginable power and glory declare that he will deliver the Hebrews from bitter and oppressive bondage would presumably amaze and delight Moses—until Moses learns that he is not to be a mere spectator. He has a key role in this deliverance. Understandably, Moses gasps, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11).

Interestingly, God does not dispute Moses’ conclusion of inadequacy. He does not remind Moses that he had been raised in the royal courts of Egypt and thus is uniquely prepared for this mission. He does not tell him that he had been foreordained to this role. In fact, the absence of a direct reply to Moses’ question “Who am I?” (an idiom for expressing insufficiency) tacitly affirms Moses’ fear. Moses is *not* equal to the task at hand. But God is, and he promises, “Certainly, I will be with thee” (Exodus 3:12). This statement is “a ubiquitous formula of divine reassurance”<sup>6</sup> and occurs over a hundred times in the Old Testament. It is most frequently used “when the addressee faces danger or a task where the risk of failure is very great.”<sup>7</sup> God does not minimize the difficulty of what he asks Moses to do. Rather, he swears that he will empower Moses and will give him what he needs to succeed.

So important is God’s promise that he offers a token to seal and affirm the oath. “And this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). It is not clear exactly what this token is. Carol Meyers writes, “God proclaims the sign [token], meant to corroborate a message from God, in language fraught with ambiguity.”<sup>8</sup> She offers several possibilities for the token, including the burning bush, the presence of God, and the eventual success of Moses’ mission. One possibility that Meyers does not mention is that the token might be a physical gesture intentionally left unrecorded because of its sacredness.

Moses has received a divine promise and a token confirming the promise. He next asks for God’s name. Scholars do not agree on exactly why Moses needs to know God’s name. Some propose that the name is a kind of test, either a test of God (if Moses already knows God’s name, he may be testing this

luminescent being to see if he is really Yahweh; cf. D&C 129) or a test of Moses (administered by the leaders of Israel to Moses to see if he has truly been in the presence of God). William Propp suggests another possibility: “Most likely, the divine name functions somehow as a password.”<sup>9</sup> Alternatively, he says, “Moses’ desire to learn the Deity’s name seems to be born, not of idle curiosity, but of a persistent aspiration to know God.”<sup>10</sup> How is God’s name related to knowing God? In the ancient world, one’s name was far more than an appellation. It revealed the very essence and nature of a person.

In Moses’ first theophany on Sinai, God refers to himself with two different names. The first is “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6) and its variation “the God of your fathers” (Exodus 3:13). William L. Lane states that “the phrase ‘the God of . . .’ is synonymous with helper, savior.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, when God says, “I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6), he is saying he has been the patriarchs’ guide, helper, and sustainer and will be Israel’s savior in their current affliction. This name-title recurs in Exodus 3:15, 16 and 4:5, “precisely in passages in which God promises salvation and deliverance to his people, and serves as a guarantee of that deliverance.”<sup>12</sup> It also reveals one of God’s defining attributes, that of Savior.

God reveals a second name when Moses asks what he should say to the children of Israel when they ask him for the name of the God who has sent him. God responds, “*ehyeh ’äšer ’ehyeh*,” translated in the King James Version as “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Propp writes, “Scholars call sentences with two identical (or nearly identical) verbs, usually connected by the relative pronoun *’äšer* [who, which, that], *idem per idem* formulae. . . . The main function of this rhetorical device is to be vague, whether to convey infinite potentiality or to conceal information, by defining a thing as itself.”<sup>13</sup> The inherent ambiguity of *’ehyeh ’äšer ’ehyeh* is reflected by the numerous translations proffered by scholars.<sup>14</sup> David Noel Freedman renders “the enigmatic expression in Exod 3:14: ‘I create what I create,’ or more simply, ‘I am the creator.’”<sup>15</sup> It is not incidental that Jehovah would introduce himself to Moses as the Creator. In ancient Near Eastern thought, the god of creation subdued the violent, primordial powers of chaos and death and imposed peace, stability, and order on the earth. Such a powerful god definitely has power to overthrow one small pharaoh.

It is possible that *’ehyeh ’äšer ’ehyeh* is not a name at all. John Durham writes, “The answer Moses receives is not, by any stretch of the imagination,

a name. It is an assertion of authority, a confession of an essential reality."<sup>16</sup> In Exodus 3:12–14, "I AM" is repeated four times in quick succession (translated as "I will be" in verse 12). Durham continues: "The repetition of these 'I AM' verbs, as awkward as it may appear, is entirely intentional. The redactor's point is just too important to be missed, and so he has labored to make it obvious: Yahweh Is. However absent he may have seemed to the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, . . . his Is-ness means Presence."<sup>17</sup> Whether we understand *'ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh* to be a reference to Jehovah's role as creator, with all the power that entails, or a theological statement of his constant, unfailing presence, the name reveals something of the nature of God.

At one point in his encounter with God, Moses expresses his concern that the children of Israel will not believe that God has appeared to him. God responds by turning a rod into a serpent and back into a rod, by turning Moses' healthy hand into a leprous one and back again, and by promising him "a third sign, which will assuredly prove decisive. This sign, which cannot be performed here, but only in Egypt,"<sup>18</sup> is the turning of the water of the Nile into blood. These signs fill multiple purposes. They assure the children of Israel that Moses comes with the power of God. They bolster Moses' flagging confidence. They may also accompany and confirm the bestowal of priesthood power.

Since both the serpent and the Nile are deified in Egypt, these signs also testify that Israel's God is more powerful than the gods of the Egyptians. The cobra was the patron goddess of Lower Egypt, and the uraeus (a stylized rearing cobra with a flared hood) was worn on the forehead by all the pharaohs as a symbol of their imperial sovereignty. When Aaron's rod turns into a serpent, it devours the Egyptian magicians' rods, which also turned into serpents, demonstrating the supremacy of the God of Israel. In a similar vein, the Nile was the source of fertility for Egypt. Its annual flooding ensured bounteous crops and established Egypt as the breadbasket of the region, which in turn generated Egypt's enormous wealth and power. Not surprisingly, the Nile was regarded as a deity, the god Hapi, who unceasingly blessed the land. To threaten or destroy the Nile was to destroy Egypt itself. When Moses turns the Nile into blood, the God of Israel destroys the river's life-giving power and sends a strong message as to who reigns supreme.

Having stood in the presence of God and having received sacred promises confirmed by tokens, names, and signs, Moses is now ready to embark on his mission. He goes forth not as a shepherd but as a prophet, a servant appointed

to represent God and endowed with power to perform miracles. He has not instantaneously transformed into a spiritual superhero; he is still reluctant and tentative. But his transformation has begun. The next time he stands on Sinai, he will have unflinchingly challenged one of the most powerful rulers in the ancient Near East, taken leadership of the Hebrew multitude, and parted the waters of the Red Sea through the power of the priesthood.

### The Establishment of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19–24)

Seven weeks after their deliverance from Egypt, the children of Israel arrive at Sinai, where they will remain for the better part of a year. On the very day they arrive, Moses ascends the mountain of God (see Exodus 19:1, 3).<sup>19</sup> In this second theophany, God invites Israel to enter into a covenant relationship with him. This invitation sheds additional light on the nature of God, particularly revealing his desire for an intimate relationship with his people.

God instructs Moses, “Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself” (Exodus 19:3–4). Here, God employs the image of a mother eagle that is teaching her eaglets to fly, who gently but firmly pushes them out of the nest so they can try their wings. If they falter, she will swoop down and bear them up on her own powerful wings.<sup>20</sup> The imagery is of tender, protective care that is ever present. According to Victor P. Hamilton, the phrase “and brought you unto myself” suggests that “God’s primary purpose of bonding with Israel is for that rapturous enjoyment of each other’s presence.”<sup>21</sup> This corresponds with Terence Fretheim’s view that “God desires to be as intimately present [with his people] as possible.”<sup>22</sup> Hamilton’s and Fretheim’s views are echoed in scripture. Doctrine and Covenants 88:63 states, “Draw near unto me and I will draw near unto you.” In 2 Nephi we read that God desires to encircle us in the arms of his love (see 2 Nephi 1:15; see also D&C 6:20). Truly, Jehovah’s great invitation is “come unto me” (Matthew 11:28), and his great desire is unity and at-one-ment.

God’s desire for intimacy with the children of Israel is also present in the phrase “ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me” (Exodus 19:5). The word “peculiar treasure” is the Hebrew word *segulla*. It denotes a treasured possession or a personal treasure. The *segulla* must be understood “against the background of the absolutist monarchies of the ancient world, where the king was the theoretical owner of everything. Within this total ownership, he might gather and

put to one side things that he specially prized and considered to be his own in a unique way. It was this that was his *ségullâ*, his choice, personal treasure."<sup>23</sup>

God also declares that Israel shall be "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). The great prerogative of priests is that they enjoy a privileged relationship with God. They can enter into sacred space and approach God in a way others cannot. They alone are exclusively dedicated to God and to his service. God is inviting all of Israel to be priests, to have an intimate, personal relationship with him. This is unique in the ancient world. Typically, the gods were above all, "something grandiose, inaccessible, dominating, and to be feared." . . . [They] were not the object of enthusiastic pursuit. The people sought the gods for protection and assistance, not for relationship."<sup>24</sup>

Moses returns to the children of Israel and extends to them God's invitation to be his people. They answer in unison, "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Once they give their preliminary commitment, God agrees to do something spectacular and amazing: he will "come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai" (Exodus 19:11), and they will hear when he speaks with Moses (see Exodus 19:9). "This is the only instance in the Old Testament where the gathered community is confronted with such a direct experience of God, hearing God speak without an intermediary. It is a *unique divine appearance*."<sup>25</sup>

However, if the people are to experience the power and glory of God, they—like Moses, who was required to remove his shoes in the first theophany—must participate in gestures of approach. This time, the Lord requires the people to wash their clothes and to abstain from sexual relations for three days. The washing of clothes clearly represents the removal of impurities and contaminations. Various reasons are suggested for the requirement of sexual abstinence. One reason is that many ancient religions used sexual rites as a way of entreating the gods to bless their lands with fertility.<sup>26</sup> The God of Israel unequivocally separated sex and worship.<sup>27</sup> Another reason is that the emission of bodily fluids was believed to make one temporarily less than whole and thus ceremonially unclean.<sup>28</sup> It must also be remembered that temporary celibacy for worshippers was common in the ancient world. William Propp explains, "This temporary continence does not imply that sex was sinful for Israelites and other ancient Near Easterners—any more than eating is sinful because people sometimes fast for religious reasons. Rather, one subjects oneself to a trial by forgoing a licit pleasurable activity."<sup>29</sup>

After the people prepare themselves for three days, God descends onto Mount Sinai. He does so heralded by thunder, lightning, smoke, trumpets, fire, and the quaking of the mount. It would appear that a volcano is erupting—except there are no active volcanoes in the area. In the midst of intense meteorological phenomena, a ram's horn begins to sound and grows steadily louder. Propp writes, "While the ram's horn is rather faint by modern, symphonic standards, it probably made a greater impression on the ancients, who inhabited a quieter world."<sup>30</sup> Moreover, there is no mention as to who is blowing the horn.<sup>31</sup> It is not Moses or any Israelite, adding to the *mysterium tremendum*<sup>32</sup> of the occasion.

At this moment of spellbinding wonder and awe, God speaks. He delivers the Ten Commandments.<sup>33</sup> When God finishes, the people withdraw, terrified. They plead with Moses, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak [or "keep speaking"<sup>34</sup>] with us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19). Moses tries to convince the people to not fear God, "for God is come to prove you" (Exodus 20:20). The word translated as "prove," *nissa*, could also be translated as "train," "initiate by ordeal," "instruct,"<sup>35</sup> or "see, experience."<sup>36</sup> Whether testing or training, Israel fails. Doctrine and Covenants 84:24 tells us, "They hardened their hearts and could not endure his [God's] presence." This does not, however, amount to a wholesale rejection of the covenant. Rather, the children of Israel place the burden and privilege of personally experiencing God on Moses. They prefer a less direct and less demanding experience.

In Exodus 24, the people participate in a ceremony to ratify and seal the covenant. They once again verbally assent in unison to the covenant. The next morning, Moses arises early, builds an altar, and sets up twelve pillars. The altar represents Yahweh, and the pillars represent the twelve tribes of Israel. The pillars, or standing stones, also serve as a witness to or a memorial of the covenant. Moses appoints some young men to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings upon the altar. It should be noted that these offerings are not the same as sin or guilt offerings. They are nonexpiatory. The burnt offering, which is burnt on the altar in its entirety, represents holding nothing back from God, a total consecration of one's being. The peace offering is apportioned between God, the priest, and the offerer. The offerer takes the majority of the sacrifice back to his family and celebrates with a feast that represents fellowship and unity with God and fellow man.



Moses next takes the blood of the sacrifices and sprinkles it upon the altar, which represents Yahweh, and upon the people, or more probably upon the pillars that represent the people. This mysterious rite is “heavily freighted with symbolism.”<sup>37</sup> The sprinkling of blood on both the altar (Yahweh) and the pillars (the people) attests to the reciprocity of this covenant. Both God and Israel are bound—God to support and defend his people; the people to love and obey their God. The sprinkling of the blood was also a “symbolic action in which the people were identified with the sacrificed animal, so that the fate of the latter is presented as the fate to be expected by the people if they violated their sacred promise.”<sup>38</sup> This kind of symbolic action was often accompanied by a self-execrative oath like, “If I transgress the terms of the covenant, may my blood be spilled as the blood of this animal was spilled.”<sup>39</sup>

To further seal the covenant, seventy elders of Israel ascend the mount, where they see the God of Israel and participate in a covenantal meal. Durham writes, “The apparent purpose of the climb up onto Sinai of this special group is that they shall have the experience, as Moses has had already, of a still more intimate contact with the Presence of Yahweh. In such a manner are they uniquely equipped for their service of guidance and teaching, of leadership.”<sup>40</sup> It is notable that God “laid not his hand” (Exodus 24:11) upon any of the elders. The apparent meaning here is that God did not harm these elders in spite of their proximity to the consuming glory and holiness of God. However, there is another possibility. The Hebrew word for “laid,” *shalach*, also means “to stretch out,” perhaps indicating that God did not extend his hand to these elders, a privilege he might have granted Moses, who enjoyed greater intimacy than did these seventy.

The effect of this second theophany is that all of Israel has transformed from the descendants of Jacob into a covenant community and a nation dedicated to God, his special treasure. While it is true that as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they are children of the covenant, it is also true that this is a new dispensation. The covenant has been renewed with them. The operative point is that in every dispensation “a covenant elevates a relationship to a more intimate, dynamic level.”<sup>41</sup> As President Henry B. Eyring has said, “Every covenant with God is an opportunity to draw closer to him. . . . To have that bond made stronger and that relationship closer is an irresistible offer.”<sup>42</sup>

### The Renewal of the Covenant (Exodus 32–34)

Within forty days of experiencing God and entering into a holy covenant through sacred rituals, the children of Israel break their covenant. This happens so fast that it could be likened unto “committing adultery on one’s wedding night.”<sup>43</sup> Moses, who at the time of this egregious breach is still with God on the upper reaches of Sinai, pleads for his people. He implores God to restrain his anger, not because the people deserve leniency, but because God has so recently gone to such lengths to deliver them, because the Egyptians will gloat over this surprising turn of events and draw erroneous conclusions about God’s intention and ability, and because of the promises made to the patriarchs (see Exodus 32:11–13).

Moses placates God, only to have his own anger “wax hot” (Exodus 32:19) when he sees Israel’s raucous rebellion for himself. Moses breaks the tables of stone, signifying the nullification of the covenant, and punishes the people. He then returns to the heights of Sinai and into the presence of God. In this third theophany, God reveals to Moses another of God’s names. Unlike the laconic name “I am that I am,” this name contains thirty-two words, all describing various attributes of God. While “thirty-two words may seem an impossibly long appellation, even for a god,”<sup>44</sup> the “multiplication of names was one way to express the power and station of the deity”<sup>45</sup> in the ancient Near East.

God’s first pronouncement is “The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious” (Exodus 34:6). This could also be translated as “The Lord. The Lord. God is merciful and gracious.” It is uncertain why God would begin his name with a twofold “The Lord.” William Propp suggests that the “repetition itself constitutes invocation, whether God calls Man (Gen 22:11; 46:2; Exod 3:4; 1 Sam 3:10) or Man calls God (Josh 22:22; Ps 22:2 [Rashi]; cf. 1 Kgs 18:39). God can also, as here, cultically invoke himself; compare [Exodus] 20:24 (21): ‘in any place where I announce my name, I will come to you and bless you.’”<sup>46</sup>

The next part of God’s name is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering” (Exodus 34:6). This mercy, grace, and longsuffering is atypical in the ancient religious milieu. There is no doctrine in Canaanite religions supporting the idea that when people have offended their god, “divine favor can be restored when the people turn to righteousness as there is in Israel.”<sup>47</sup>

God declares that he is “abundant in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). “Goodness” is the Hebrew word *hesed*, a word for which no simple translation exists in English. It is used in covenantal contexts, as well as elsewhere, and it conveys the sense of steadfast loyalty to the covenant. This stands in stark contrast to the behavior of the children of Israel, who are far from steadfast and immovable.

The final phrase of God’s name is “keeping mercy for thousands [that is, thousands of generations], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7). While God’s mercy and forgiveness are again emphasized, it is now revealed that justice is an essential part of God’s nature. God will not clear the guilty or overlook sin. Mercy will not rob justice. God will visit the iniquity of the fathers unto the fourth generation. But his mercy will extend until the thousandth generation—250 times longer than his anger. No wonder when Moses hears the name of God and understands his nature he bows his head and worships the benevolent and merciful Redeemer.

Moses again implores God to forgive the stiffnecked people, to pardon their sin, and to take them as his inheritance (see Exodus 34:9). The word translated as “inheritance,” *nahala*, refers to an eternal, inalienable possession. In other words, Moses is asking God to take Israel once again as his own special possession, his *segulla*. Could God possibly be *that* benevolent? *That* merciful? God responds, “Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation” (Exodus 34:10). God will not permanently revoke the privilege of a covenant relationship. Israel will once again be his people. He will be their God. He will do marvels. The root of the Hebrew word translated as “marvels” is *p-l'* and means “wonderful, surpassing, extraordinary, or marvelous.” When God says he will do things that “have not been done in all the earth” (Exodus 34:10), the word “done” is from the Hebrew word *bara'*, “to create.” It is the word used in Genesis 1. In other words, as Fretheim writes, what God is about to do “is of such an unprecedented nature that only creation language, combined with language of marvel and awe, can adequately describe it.”<sup>48</sup> What is this act? It is the miracle of forgiveness.

The effect of this third theopany is that God and Israel are reconciled. The people are restored to a nation of priests, though not collectively, for God

with all his compassion will not abandon justice or judgment. A representative group, the Levites, will appear before God. They will bear the priesthood—a preparatory priesthood—of God.

### Conclusion

Sinai was the setting for three theophanies that shaped the history of Israel. Theophanies often included preparatory gestures of approach and covenants that were sealed and ratified by holy actions. Those who experienced a theophany inevitably learned more about the nature of God and underwent individual or corporate transformation. Significantly, many of these aspects of theophanies became a ritualized part of temple worship. John Lundquist writes, “The temple of Solomon would seem ultimately to be little more than the architectural realization and the ritual enlargement of the Sinai experience.”<sup>49</sup> This is true not only of Solomon’s and Herod’s temples, but also of the temples of the restored gospel. Our temple experience includes gestures of approach, covenants, ratifying signs and tokens, verbal assents, sacrifices of heart and will at an altar, coming to understand the nature of God, and personal transformation. Each time we figuratively climb the mountain of the Lord, we, like Moses, can enter into God’s presence. We, like Moses, can experience the glory, grandeur, love, support, and mercy of our God. We, like Moses, can bow our head and worship in loving reverence and awe. This is the privilege and potential of temple worship for every endowed Latter-day Saint. As Karl G. Maeser has said, “There is a Mount Sinai for every child of God if he only knows how to climb it.”<sup>50</sup>

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### Notes

1. Donald W. Parry, “Sinai as Sanctuary and Mountain of God,” in *By Study and Also By Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 1:482.

2. It is difficult to determine exactly how many trips Moses makes to the summit of Sinai and into the presence of God because of the “chronological morass” of Exodus 19 due to “profound redactional and source complexity.” Carol Meyers, *Exodus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 144. However, this paper rests not on how many trips Moses makes up Sinai but rather on the three different periods in which Moses ascends the mountain and enters the presence of God.

3. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 46.

4. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, Anchor Bible 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 200.

5. Umberto Moshe David Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 2005), 34.

6. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 203.

7. D. E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), quoted in Hamilton, *Exodus*, 59.

8. Meyers, *Exodus*, 56.

9. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 223; cf. D&C 130:11; see also Gaye Strathearn, “Revelation: John’s Message of Comfort and Hope,” in *The Testimony of John the Beloved* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1998), 292.

10. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 223.

11. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 429.

12. Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, 430.

13. Propp, *Exodus*, 225.

14. For instance, Alter suggests “I Am He Who Endures” and “He Who Brings Things into Being.” Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Norton, 2004) 321. Fretheim prefers “I will be who I am/I am who I will be.” Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 63; Propp supports “I will be who I will be.” *Exodus 1–18*, 205.

15. David Noel Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 2 (June 1960): 154. According to Freedman, although the Masoretic Text (MT) has the active verb form (Qal), it was originally causative (Hiphil). Thus, in his translation, Freedman uses the causative “I bring into being” or “I create” (152, 153). Paul Haupt, William F. Albright, and Frank Moore Cross all favor a similar interpretation. See Propp, *Exodus*, 225.

16. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary 3 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 38.

17. Durham, *Exodus*, 39.

18. Cassuto, *Exodus*, 48.

19. Verse two is a parenthetical note and obscures the urgency.

20. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 210.

21. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 302.

22. Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God, Overtures of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 65.

23. Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 198, 199.

24. John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 161.

25. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 214; emphasis in original.

26. Scholars refer to this as “sympathetic magic.” The idea is that the people would engage in actions that the gods would imitate. The copulation of gods was considered to bring fertility to the earth in Canaanite religious belief.

27. Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1973), 293.

28. Meyers, *Exodus*, 154.

29. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, Anchor Bible 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 163.

30. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 164.

31. “One may assume this blast is of celestial origin probably blown by a member of God’s angelic entourage, to announce the awe-inspiring descent of the King of all the earth.” Alter, *Five Books of Moses*, 426.

32. This phrase was coined by Rudolf Otto to describe the numinous awe that comes from experiencing God. See Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 12, 13ff.

33. Some scholars believe that Exodus 19:19–25 are displaced and Exodus 19:19a should be followed not by vv. 19b–25, but by 20:1. See Durham, *Exodus*, 269, 270.

34. Durham, *Exodus*, 301.

35. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 182.

36. Durham, *Exodus*, 303.

37. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 308.

38. George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, “Covenant,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:1185.

39. See Ruth 1:17; 1 Kings 19:2; Alma 44:13, 14; 46:21–24.

40. Durham, *Exodus*, 344; cf. D&C 95:3, 4; 105:9–11.

41. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 301.

42. Henry B. Eyring, “Making Covenants with God,” in *Speeches, Brigham Young University 1996–1997* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Publications and Graphics, 1997), 15.

43. R. W. L. Moberly, “Exodus,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. K. J. Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 48, quoted in Hamilton, *Exodus*, 531.

44. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 609.

45. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 92.

46. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 610.

47. Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea*, Anchor Bible 24 (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 476.

48. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 308.

49. John M. Lundquist, “What Is a Temple? A Preliminary Typology,” in *Temples of the Ancient World*, ed. Donald W. Parry (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 85.

50. Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book 1996), 452.