The God Who Makes Himself Known

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The God who makes himself known

THE MISSIONARY HEART OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS

W. Ross Blackburn
Chapter Two

The name of the redeemer
(Exod. 1:1 – 15:21)

If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—
let Israel now say—
if it had not been the LORD who was on our side
when people rose up against us,
then they would have swallowed us up alive,
when their anger was kindled against us;
then the flood would have swept us away,
the torrent would have gone over us;
then over us would have gone
the raging waters.

Blessed be the LORD,
who has not given us
as prey to their teeth!
We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken,
and we have escaped!

Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth.

(Psalm 124)

Whatever the precise referent, Psalm 124 well describes the exodus, Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian slavery: the rising of an angry people in pursuit, great waters threatening to wash Israel away, the escape from bondage as a bird from a snare. Likewise, the psalm reflects Israel’s response: blessing the name of the Lord, and proclaiming the Lord as her help. In this song of ascents the memory of the past leads to praise in the present, and faith for the future. For the Lord has revealed himself as being willing and able to do Israel good, and so Israel proclaims, ‘Our help is in the name of the LORD’.
Names in the Bible are not mere labels, but often stand for the character and/or destiny of the bearer.\(^1\) Abram becomes Abraham (father of many) upon the impending arrival of Isaac, through whom Abraham will become the father of many nations. Jacob is named Israel (God fights) after wrestling with God, a name then aptly applied to the nation of Jacob's descendants. Moses' name reflects his origin, and perhaps destiny, as one drawn out of water. Jesus is so named because he will bring salvation to his people.\(^2\) In other words a name often suggests content and contours, which define who a person is. So when the psalmist speaks of the name of the Lord in Psalm 124:8, he speaks specifically of one who has a character that can be known. Through what the Lord has done, he has revealed who he is. And, thus, Israel knows his name. To know the name of the Lord implies knowing the Lord, not simply the label by which he is called. 'Our help is in the name of the LORD'.

The problem: Exodus 6:3 and the name of the Lord

One of the most important critical problems in modern biblical scholarship has to do with this very issue, the name of the Lord. In what would become one of the central texts of the Documentary Hypothesis, Exodus 6:3 states, 'By my name the LORD I did not make myself known to [the patriarchs], a statement that appears to contradict the frequent use of the name in Genesis. Rowley (1950: 25) put the matter most starkly:

Obviously it cannot be true that God was not known to Abraham by the name Yahweh [Exod. 6:3] and that He was known to him by that name [Gen. 15:2, 7]. To this extent there is a flat contradiction that cannot be resolved by any shift.

The traditional critical solution argued that different sources reflected different understandings of when the name was revealed to

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\(^1\) Adler 2009: 265: 'Names in the Tanakh are never meaningless. Rather, there is a pronounced trend in biblical Hebrew to functional or objective eponymy – that is, the names of things or people are given to describe something about them. A name is an attempt to define the character of the named thing in essence.'

\(^2\) The Gospel of John in particular demonstrates the equivalence of believing in Jesus and believing in his name (e.g. John 1:12; 3:18).
Israel. Although widely acknowledged that the presence (or absence) of the divine name did not perfectly match the typically accepted source divisions, the theory nonetheless held. Noth's words (1981: 23) concerning the call narratives of Exodus 3 and 6 reflected the perspective of many:

Regardless of scholarly ingenuity, no one has offered a more plausible explanation of the usage of the divine names than the view that these were two originally independent narrative works, the 'Yahwist' and the 'Elohist,' which were later combined.³

Others, however, were unconvinced, some arguing that the contrast implied in 6:3 had not to do with when the name was revealed, but rather what the name revealed. It was argued that it was not the name per se that was new, but that a new and more complete understanding of the name was being revealed. In other words the emphasis fell not upon the label by which the Lord was called, but rather upon the nature and character of the Lord now being revealed as something new in the experience of Israel. Motyer's rendering of 6:2–3 (1959: 12) reflects this sense:

And God spoke to Moses, and said to him: I am Yahweh. And I showed myself to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob in the character of El Shaddai, but in the character expressed by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them.⁴

Of those who see a change in significance in the divine name between Genesis and Exodus 6:3, most commonly understand the name as referring to the fulfillment of the patriarchal promises. Childs (1974: 115) expresses it well:

for the biblical writer the revelation of different names is important because it made known the character of God. He had made a covenant with the patriarchs as El Shaddai, but they had not experienced the fulfillment of that promise. Now

³ A few have sought to resolve the problem linguistically. See G. R. Driver 1973; Andersen 1974: 102; Whitney 1986.
⁴ See also Abba 1961: 323–324; Buber 1958: 49; Freedman 1960; Gianotti 1985; Martens 1994: 19.
God reveals himself through his name as the God who fulfills his promise and redeems Israel from Egypt.

According to this view, the period prior to the Egyptian deliverance was a time of anticipation, for the promises made to the patriarchs had yet to be fulfilled. The character of the Lord as expressed in 6:3 is one who is faithful to his covenant commitments. The fulfilment of the promises will bring with it an understanding of the Lord as one who fulfils his word.

In looking at 1:1 – 15:21 canonically this chapter follows Childs and others in arguing that what is new in 6:3 is an interpretation of the divine name, and not the name itself. However, I will argue that the fulfilment of the patriarchal promises, while important, is not what ultimately distinguishes the significance of the name Yahweh from Genesis to Exodus, but rather that, in the light of the narrative context of 1:1 – 15:21, what is new in 6:3 is the revelation of the Lord as Redeemer, the God who, being supreme over all creation, is willing and able to deliver his people. To make that argument, I begin by setting the problem in its canonical context, seeking to demonstrate that the driving theological concern of 1:1 – 15:21 is the Lord’s commitment to be known to Israel, Egypt and throughout the earth.

That the name be known (Exod. 1:7)

Exodus begins by connecting itself to the past, recounting the names of Jacob’s sons who settled in Egypt, and then commenting on the passing of that generation. We are told nothing of the life of the Israelites in Egypt, save for one detail: ‘The people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them’ (Exod. 1:7). Serving a far greater purpose than simply alerting the reader to the growth of Jacob’s family into a nation, the description of Israel’s fruitfulness takes us back to two cardinal passages in Genesis that speak to the purposes of God. The first is God’s mandate to humanity in Genesis 1:28:

And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have domin-

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5 Seeing 6:3 as referring to the meaning of the name need not be driven by canonical concerns. For linguistic arguments to that end, see Motyer 1959.
ion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'

When interpreted firmly within the context of Genesis 1, God's mandate to be fruitful and exercise dominion has the distinctly missionary purpose of making himself known throughout creation. Because humanity is the image of God (1:26), the command calls for God's image to spread throughout, and ultimately fill, the earth. Furthermore, as humanity spreads throughout the earth, he is called to exercise dominion, governing God's creation as befits his status as God's image. The effect of the commandment, then, is that life on the earth would witness to the character of God, as God's image spreads and governs according to his likeness and character. The implied purpose of God in Genesis 1 is expressed throughout the Bible:

Blessed be his glorious name for ever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!

(Ps. 72:19; cf. e.g. Isa. 6:2; Hab. 2:14)

The second passage to which Exodus 1:7 calls attention is Genesis 12:1–3:

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Inaugurating his call to Israel, the Lord promises to make Abraham a great nation, through which all the families of the earth will be blessed. From the beginning, the call of Abraham has a worldwide scope. This promise of nationhood, and hence the worldwide blessing that would come from that nation, depends on Abraham's fruitfulness: 'I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you' (Gen. 17:6; cf. 26:2–5,

6 For a defence of the translation 'as God's image', see Clines 1968.
24; 28:14). The connection between Genesis 12:1–3 and Exodus 1:7 is further supported by the reference to Jacob’s descendants in Egypt in Exodus 1:1–6, demonstrating that God’s promise to Abraham is being fulfilled.

The convergence of Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 12:1–3 in Exodus 1:7 is important on at least three levels. First, it suggests that Israel is living under the blessing of God. It is noteworthy that in both Genesis passages blessing is connected with multiplication, the bearing of children being an expression of God’s blessing. In the words of Psalm 105:24, concerning Israel in Egypt, ‘The LORD made his people very fruitful and made them stronger than their foes.’ Furthermore, given that both Genesis texts reflect God’s commitment to be known, Israel’s fruitfulness indicates that God’s missionary purposes were going forward in Egypt. While this inference will need to be confirmed as we read further, the convergence of these two cardinal texts suggests, from the beginning, that mission is very much in view in the book of Exodus.

Secondly, the recognition of God’s larger missionary purposes sets up the coming conflict with Pharaoh in the broadest terms possible. It is precisely Israel’s multiplication that Pharaoh seeks to restrain. Again in language reminiscent of Genesis 1:27, and in response to Exodus 1:7, Pharaoh gives the reason for his ensuing oppression of Israel: ‘Behold, the people of Israel are many and stronger than us’ (1:9, my tr.; cf. 1:7). The nature of the conflict becomes clear: Pharaoh directly (albeit unwittingly) seeks to undermine God’s purposes not only for Israel, but also for the world. Understanding Exodus 1:7 in connection with God’s purposes in creation and for Israel exposes what is ultimately at stake in the coming conflict with Pharaoh, which dominates Exodus 1:8 – 15:21: Pharaoh’s opposition threatens God’s purposes to be known throughout the world.

Finally, the allusions to Genesis 1 and Genesis 12 in Exodus 1:7 point to an important insight concerning God’s purposes in Exodus.

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7 E.g. Deut. 7:13–14; Pss 127, 128. Conversely, barrenness is roundly lamented in the Bible (e.g. Sarah, Rachel, Hannah, Elizabeth).

8 When Pharaoh’s attempt to stem Israel’s growth through brutal slavery fails to work, Pharaoh directly attacks Israel’s growth by calling for Israel’s infant boys to be killed. The account of the midwives whom Pharaoh commanded to kill the male children (1:16) encapsulates the conflict. Caught between the will of God and the will of Pharaoh, they are forced to choose sides, disobeying Pharaoh explicitly because they fear God (1:17). In response (and in a hint of God’s eventual triumph over Pharaoh), God rewards the midwives with families, further extending his will that Israel be fruitful and multiply.
In Genesis 1:27 the implication of God’s call to humanity is that the earth reflect his nature as it is filled with his image. In other words God’s call is for the sake of his glory, that he might be known for who he is throughout creation. In Genesis 12:1–3 the Lord’s purpose in calling Abram is explained from a different angle: God’s intention through Abraham is blessing, for Abraham’s descendants and, through them, the world. In other words Genesis 12:1–3 suggests that God’s missionary purpose is for the good of the world. These two angles work together to suggest within Exodus the conviction held by the church through the ages: God does what he does for his glory and for the good of his people.

The name unknown (Exod. 1:8 – 2:25)

Yet, despite Israel’s living under the blessing of God, Exodus begins with a problem. Whereas Exodus 1:7 speaks of God’s purpose to make himself known throughout the earth, Exodus 1:8 introduces a world ignorant of the Lord. Characteristic of Exodus 1 – 2 is a curious and noteworthy absence of the name of the Lord, an absence particularly striking in the light of the abundant presence of the Lord’s name from Exodus 3 onwards. In fact, save for the comment that Hebrew midwives feared God, there is no indication that Israel even acknowledged the God of their fathers in Exodus 1 – 2. Israel cries out under their affliction, and their cries are heard by God, but the text does not indicate that Israel cried out to God. This inference that the Lord was largely unknown, admittedly argued from silence, is supported both by Moses’ asking for the Lord’s name (3:14)⁹ and by Pharaoh’s question ‘Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?’ (5:2). Whereas early in Genesis ‘people began to call upon the name of the LORD’ (Gen. 4:26), Exodus begins with an apparently universal ignorance of the Lord’s name. Thus, at the beginning of the narrative, two inferences can be made: God is clearly at work among Israel, and yet Israel, like the rest of the world, appears to be ignorant of her God. The rest of the narrative concerns both – God continues to work in and through Israel for the sake of the world, as he reveals himself to Israel as her God. In this

⁹ Moses’ question does not require that Israel would not have known the name. Seitz (1998: 236–237) suggests that Moses asks for the name in anticipation that Israel will test Moses to ensure he comes in the name of the God of their fathers. For reasons stated above, and further below, the absence of the name in Exod. 1 – 2 suggests this interpretation is unlikely.
way the problem with which Exodus is chiefly concerned is brought forth from the beginning of the narrative.\textsuperscript{10}

The corollary to Israel’s ignorance of God is the situation in which she finds herself in Exodus 1. The description of Israel’s plight is given immediately after Pharaoh’s decree to ‘deal shrewdly’ with Israel, in order to stem their growth:

So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves. (Exod. 1:13–14)

Two matters are particularly important to note. First, Israel does not know the Lord, and finds herself serving Pharaoh. Presumably due to the desire for more interesting prose, this emphasis on Israel’s serving (Hebrew root ‘bd) Pharaoh is typically obscured in most English translations. The verses immediately above can be translated more literally as follows:

And the Egyptians forced the sons of Israel to serve with violence. And they caused their lives to be bitter with hard service, with mortar and with brick and with all kinds of service in the field. In all their service with which they served, in violence. (Tr. and emphases mine)

The repetition of the verb ‘to serve’ highlights Israel’s slavery, that Israel is not her own master, but rather the forced servant of another.

Secondly, the nature of their service is deeply and violently oppressive. This oppression begins with Pharaoh’s afflicting them with heavy burdens as they are exploited for economic profit while they build Pharaoh’s cities. Beatings were apparently common. That the incident of an Egyptian’s beating a Hebrew (2:11–15) is not an isolated event is made plain when we are later told that the Egyptian taskmasters beat the Hebrew foremen (5:14). Finally, and most chillingly, when Israel continues to multiply in the midst of such oppression, Pharaoh issues the order to kill Israel’s infant boys. While the text does not specifically report the death of any children, that Moses’ mother hid him for three months after birth before releasing him to an uncertain future (and possible death) suggests that the threat was very real indeed.

\textsuperscript{10} Supporting this inference, see Ps. 106:7 and Ezek. 20.
Because many modern readers, particularly in the West, are unfamiliar with what is involved in brickmaking, we are warranted in exploring further what other readers would intuitively understand:

Brickmaking operations are big business in several developing nations. Usually resembling a rustic fortress, most are surrounded by walls seven or eight feet high — to keep brick poachers out, and to keep slave laborers in. They have a dark, otherworldly presence to them because of the dust and smoke that hang constantly in the air, coating everything within the walls with gray-red dust and soot. . . . The kilns require extra labor, because someone has to stoke the charcoal first constantly to keep them at their optimum temperature. This is one of the worst jobs in an operation defined by awful jobs — excruciatingly hot, dirty, and sticky, the workers covered with charcoal dust that mixes with the dust of clay and dirt until sweat-soaked skin begins to harden and crack.

Before the bricks are ready for the kiln, they must be shaped and predried in the sun. All day long, slaves perform the backbreaking labor of packing wet clay and straw into molds that form the bricks. They slap the clay into the molds forming row after row, then other workers, usually children, carry the bricks on their heads to set them out in the sun to dry. When they are dry enough to fire, the slaves carry them to the kiln to be baked. Hour after hour, day after day, weeks that flow into months, months that fade into years . . . some of these slaves have been at this dirty, tedious, painful work for decades with no relief in sight. Until now.\(^\text{11}\)

This account of modern-day slave labour might well have been written of Israel's life in Egypt: an oppressed people living as slaves under the threat of death, subject to physical brutality, making bricks for the economic profit of their oppressors. Lingering here is important, for if we don't understand the plight of Israel from the beginning, we will fail to appreciate both the magnitude of the deliverance that communicates the nature of God and thereby reveals his name, and the difference between Israel's serving Pharaoh and serving the Lord.

Thus at the beginning of Exodus we see Israel's plight. Ignorant of her God, she serves another in great affliction. Here we see two conditions that, in the Scriptures, always go together, for it is in knowing and serving the Lord that the people of God find blessing, and are freed from masters that bring harm, not good. As Israel forsakes the Lord she ends up serving others, whether the Philistines, the Midianites, the Assyrians or the Babylonians, masters that oppress, not bless. But the lesson runs deeper. An important implication of Jesus' words 'no one can serve two masters' is that everyone will serve one, a truth that Paul addresses foundationally in his claim that unless one is a servant of Christ, he is a servant of sin (Rom. 6:15–19). The plight of Israel in Egypt illustrates this larger truth that runs throughout the Scriptures.

The name made known (Exod. 3 – 14)

If Exodus 1 – 2 presents the problem, that the name of the Lord is not known, Exodus 3 begins the solution, where the Lord makes his name known. A key passage concerning the divine name in all of the OT, here the Lord's name first appears in Exodus, and is explained.

Our task is to discern the meaning of the divine name firmly within the literary context in which it first appears in Exodus. While literary context is always important in biblical interpretation, it is particularly important here for two reasons that will become apparent as we press into Exodus. First, the ambiguous nature of the name as given to Moses makes it more tempting to interpret it outside its literary context, a task that has often been taken in OT scholarship. The most basic item to note in this regard is that the Lord gives his name to Moses in response to a specific question. Our starting point in understanding the meaning of the name is to understand it, not as an independent datum concerning the nature of God, but as the answer to a question. The context of that question is crucial.

Secondly, the meaning of the name is perhaps the primary burden of the book of Exodus as a whole. Brueggemann (1997: 124) has gone so far as to suggest that 'it is plausible that the entire Exodus narrative is an exposition of the name of Exod 3:14, requiring all its powerful verbs for an adequate expression'.12 If it is the case that the

12 Cf. Jacob (1992: 76–77) who writes, imagining the voice of God, 'Should someone wish to question My name, he is right, for he will discover that He who is Almighty and helpful will indeed help.'
whole book of Exodus is concerned with explaining God’s name, as I will argue it is, then it is particularly important that we begin carefully. In a flight from Boston a few degrees at the beginning can mean the difference between landing in Seattle or Los Angeles.

Exodus 3 finds Moses, a refugee from Egypt tending sheep in Midian, in his first encounter with the Lord, who commissions him to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery. Fearful concerning the task before him, Moses presents a hypothetical question: What if the people of Israel ask Moses, ‘What is his [God’s] name?’ (Exod. 3:13). In asking for God’s name Moses is not asking the philosophical or existential question, but is rather concerned for his life and the lives of the Israelites should they attempt to escape from Egypt.

God said [wayyōmer] to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’ ['ēhyeh ‘āsher ‘ēhyeh]. And he said [wayyōmer], ‘Say this to the people of Israel, “I am has sent me to you.”’ God also said [wayyōmer] to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel, “The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.’ (Exod. 3:14–15)

Some modern scholarship has seen this response, particularly with its threefold ‘and he said’ [wayyōmer] as ‘garbled’, ‘overcrowded’ or ‘swollen’.13 Another possibility is that these statements actually work together to suggest the meaning of the name Yahweh, articulated in 3:15. If so, how are these statements related? The following will suggest that the Lord’s answer to Moses is given in three stages, each building upon the one before, together giving an interpretation of the name that addresses Israel’s hypothetical concern of 3:13. We will take each of these statements in order.

‘I am who I am’

As has been noted by many, ‘I AM WHO I AM’ ('ēhyeh 'āsher 'ēhyeh) in 3:14 looks back to ‘I am with you’ ('ēhyeh 'īmmāk) in 3:12.14 The Lord has appeared to Moses and has called him to go to Pharaoh and bring Israel out from Egypt. Moses responds with the question,
‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?’ (3:11). The question is not existential (Moses knows who he is), but rather an expression of doubt concerning whether or not he can succeed. Responding to Moses’ real concern, the Lord answers, ‘I am with you,’ an answer that says nothing about Moses, but much about the Lord. Implied in the Lord’s answer is both his presence with Moses in his task, and his power to enable Moses to succeed.  

Moses then asks for a response should Israel ask him the name of the ‘God of your fathers’. The Lord responds with ‘I am who I am,’ a reply that has engendered great discussion. Several translations are linguistically possible, accounting for the multitude of suggestions. Citing the flexibility of the imperfect tense, Brichto argues for the legitimacy of multiple translations, each of which suggests important nuances of the name. The linguistic flexibility in Hebrew of ‘I am who I am’ suggests that a more fruitful approach would be to examine a particular interpretation in the light of the immediate canonical context, and then to rule out certain readings, rather than to insist on a precise English translation. Two elements are important in understanding ‘I am who I am.’ First, the relationship between 3:12 (‘I am with you’) and 3:14 (‘I am who I am’) suggests that the meaning of 3:14a is related to the promise of success, for the

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15 The two other appearances of 'ehyeh in Exodus (4:12, 15) carry the same sense.
16 For an extensive bibliography, see Sæbo 1998: 78–79.
17 Most proposals follow the traditional pattern ‘I am/will be who/what I am/ will be’. Proposals offered as an alternative to the traditional possibilities fall into two broad categories. One alternative, offered by Albright (1924), finds YHWH to be a hiphil of the verb Ḥayah (to be), and supports an emendation that he renders, ‘I cause to be what comes into existence.’ Freedman (1960) largely follows Albright, by translating the phrase as ‘I am the creator,’ although he argues that the parallel between 3:14 and 33:19 makes the emendation unnecessary. The weakness of the above proposals, however, is that each ultimately relies upon conjecture, either upon textual emendation or a hypothetical hiphil form of ‘to-be’ that occurs nowhere else in the Masoretic Text (the causative stem for Ḥayah being the piel). The other alternative, proposed by Schild (1954) and Lindblom (1964), suggests that the relative clause ‘that I am’ is governed by the first ‘ehyeh, rendering the translation ‘I am he who is.’ Albrektson (1968) argues for a return to the traditional possibilities, convincingly demonstrating that the parallels upon which Schild’s and Lindblom’s proposals are based are not adequate parallels to 3:14a. Following Albrektson, the present argument will work with the understanding that the Hebrew phrase is best rendered according to the traditional pattern.
18 Brichto (1983: 29) argues for every combination of ‘I was’/‘I am’/‘I will be’, saying, ‘The multivalence and ambiguity of the imperfect tense in biblical Hebrew is often exploited by Scripture’s authors to make a statement in a broadly inclusive sense even while it is addressed to a particular context.’
THE NAME OF THE REDEEMER

Lord will be present as Moses and Israel carry out his will. Secondly, the ambiguity of 'I am who I am' must be honoured. While not a rebuff or refusal to answer, the Lord's response in 3:14a is nonetheless vague, and certainly not a complete answer. As Zimmerli (1978: 21) has written, 3:14 'refuses to "explain" the name in a way that would confine it within the cage of a definition'. One effect of this is to give the divine name a future orientation, opening the possibility, even expectation, of further revelation. Any 'definition', or understanding, of the name would become clearer as God makes himself known in rescuing Israel from Egypt.

'I am' has sent me to you

The second stage in the revelation echoes 3:14a: 'And he said [way-yōmer], thus you shall say to Israel, "I am" has sent me to you' (my tr.). Whereas 3:14a was given for Moses, 3:14b is given for Israel, in direct response to Israel's hypothetical question. The nature of Israel's question has been much discussed, mostly along the lines of whether Israel would be asking for a name previously known, in order to test Moses' claim to speak for their God, 19 whether Israel would be enquiring concerning the character of God, 20 or whether Israel was enquiring concerning a previously unknown name. 21 Here again the literary context helps us. The similarity between the Lord's answer to Israel ('I am') and the Lord's answer to Moses ('I am who I am') may suggest a similar question. In a manner comparable to Moses' own need for assurance in going before Pharaoh, Moses envisions Israel's having similar misgivings, and therefore needing similar assurance that this mission would be successful. 22 In response to this desire for assurance the Lord tells Moses to answer Israel in a manner that would reflect the promise of his presence: 'I am has sent me to you,' thereby assuring Israel of the success of the upcoming exodus. 23

22 On linguistic grounds, Buber (1958: 48) has argued that the Hebrew expression does not ask for God's name, but is rather a question concerning the character of God. See Abba 1961: 323, and especially Motty (1959: 17–24), who has tested Buber's suggestion throughout the OT.
23 In favour of such a reading is the sense it makes of the sequence between 3:14a and 3:14b. It has been widely recognized that 'I am who I am' is not a direct answer to Moses' question, leading some (e.g. Arnold 1905: 129–130; cf. Bernhardt 1978:
‘The LORD, the God of your fathers . . .’

Assurance of the presence of Moses’ God, however, would not be enough for Israel, for 3:14 has not formally answered the question that Moses envisions Israel asking. This leads to the Lord’s third reply to Moses, where the name Yahweh is specifically given. The giving of the name completes Moses’ answer to Israel, assuring Israel that the God of Moses is the God of Israel. Particularly notable is the almost identical wording of 3:14b and 3:15a:

3:14b: Say this to the people of Israel, I AM has sent me to you.

3:15a: Say this to the people of Israel, the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.

Except for the rendering of the divine name, where ‘I AM’ in 3:14b directly parallels ‘the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob’ in 3:15a, the above sentences are identical. Considering that ‘I AM’ is not, strictly speaking, the divine name itself, the parallel suggests that ‘I AM’ is an interpretation, or explanation, of the name of the God of their fathers. Put differently, the linguistic similarity between 3:14b and 3:15a suggests that the meaning of ‘I AM’ is equivalent to the meaning of ‘the LORD, the God of [the patriarchs]’. Given what we have discovered concerning the significance of ‘I AM’ in 3:12 and 3:14, the name ‘the LORD’ in 3:15a therefore carries with it the promise of God’s presence in leaving Egypt and the corresponding assurance of success. Confirming this inference are the Lord’s words in 3:16, where the Lord goes on to assure the people that, as the God of their fathers, he will deliver them from Egyptian oppression and bring them into an abundant land.

376–381; Noth 1962: 43–44; Phillips and Phillips 1998: 81–83) to assume that it is an interpolation. However, if the function of 3:14b is to provide assurance to Israel that what Moses anticipates will be needed, then 3:14b becomes dependent upon 3:14a, thereby eliminating the need for an interpolator. Furthermore, it also addresses Arnold’s contention that ‘I am’ was substituted for ‘the LORD’ in 3:14b due to respect for the divine name, for an introduction of the divine name without the prior explanation of 3:14 would have yielded a much different sense. Rather than being a problem, the threefold ‘and he said’ (wayyômer) marks a logical progression leading to an understanding of the name in 3:15.
Understood in this way, the Lord’s answer to Moses becomes less problematic. The threefold repetition of God ‘said’ (wayyōmer) is not needlessly repetitive, but marks an answer in three stages, each building upon the previous one, together answering Moses’ (and by implication Israel’s) concern. Israel will be delivered, because the God of their fathers has heard their groaning, and is willing and able to deliver them. Furthermore, the Lord has given his name in such a way that has not exhausted its meaning. The rest of the book of Exodus, and in particular the manner in which the Lord will deliver Israel, will shed further light on the meaning of the name. And Israel will come to know her God.

‘I am the LORD’

Not only does 3:14–15 not exhaust the meaning of the name, but it suggests a future orientation, for the ‘I AM’ begs the questions ‘You are what?’ or ‘Who are you?’, questions that await an answer. A specific illustration of the name begging such a question can be found in Jesus’ words to the Jews, where ‘if you do not believe that I am,’ you will die in your sins’ provokes the reply ‘Who are you?’ (John 8:24–25). In Exodus this implied question ‘Who are you?’ is addressed with the very specific phrase ‘I am the LORD.’ As we will see, the principal burden of Exodus 5 – 15 is to give meaning to that name.

In a manner similar to the revelation of the name in Exodus 3, the revelation of the name in Exodus 5 – 15 is also introduced by a question. In response to the command of the Lord to release Israel, addressing Pharaoh as a subject in language that Pharaoh uses to address Israel, Pharaoh asks a question to which the rest of 5 – 15 will be the answer: ‘Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go’ (Exod. 5:2). Unlike Moses’ question of 3:13, however, Pharaoh’s question is not one of enquiry, but of defiance. Goldingay’s translation of 5:2 (2003: 340) captures the sense well: ‘Who is Yhwh that I should listen to his voice and let Israel go? I do not acknowledge Yhwh. No, I will not let Israel go.’ In a further comment on 5:2 Goldingay (2003: 341) writes that Pharaoh

24 My tr. Ego eimi used here is the LXX translation of ‘ehyeh in Exod. 3:14. The common translation ‘I am he’ adds a ‘he’ not present in the Greek NT, thus obscuring the connection to Exod. 3:14.
'is declining to recognize Yhwh's authority. He is laying down his own gauntlet for the fight that Yhwh also wishes to have.' The conflict between Pharaoh and the Lord, only implicit in 1:8, becomes explicit. Pharaoh's defiant response, then, serves as the theological context for the section. 26 The remainder of the exodus account is the answer to Pharaoh's question.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of 'I am Yahweh' in the exodus narrative, for knowing the Lord is the theme and ultimate goal of the plagues. 27 As Zimmerli (1982: 9) has argued in his broader study titled 'I am Yahweh',

[t]he phrase 'I am Yahweh' carries all the weight and becomes the denominator upon which all else rests. . . . [E]verything Yahweh has to announce to his people appears as an amplification of the fundamental statement, 'I am Yahweh.'

Applied to the exodus narrative, Zimmerli's statement is most strongly supported by the Lord's words to Pharaoh:

For this time I will send all my plagues on you yourself, and on your servants and your people, so that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth. For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth. (Exod. 9:14–16)

The above statement is critical for understanding the purpose of the plagues. While Israel's liberation is crucial in Exodus, the Lord's words make it clear that liberation is not the reason for the succession of plagues. This is not to downplay the Lord's compassion for Israel or his remembering his covenant, but simply to say that neither of those things accounts for the manner in which the Lord overcame Egypt and released Israel. If Israel's liberation was the

26 Sailhamer 1992: 249. According to Carpenter (1997: 102), 'Exod. 5:1–2 is a programmatic piece that illustrates the concerns to be dealt with throughout chs. 5–17.'
27 Fretheim (1991b: 387) observes that, rather than plagues, the language of Exodus most often refers to signs (4:17; 7:3; 8:17; 10:1–2) or wonders (4:21; 7:3, 9; 11:9–10), an emphasis more in keeping with the ultimate goal of communication in the plague narratives.
controlling issue, the narrative might have quickly moved from 5:2 to 14:30a: ‘Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians.’ Rather, it is the Lord’s desire to be known throughout the land that accounts for the plagues, and therefore the narrative of chapters 5 – 14. As Fretheim (1991a: 95) claims, ‘there is a fundamental mission orientation to the entire plague cycle’ (emphasis original).

God is great: the Lord is God
If the primary purpose of the signs and wonders was not deliverance, per se, but rather communication, that raises the questions ‘What was “I am the LORD” intended to communicate? What kind of God did the Egyptian deliverance reveal the Lord to be?’ A survey of these statements (and several closely related statements)28 in 1:1 – 15:21 points to the Lord’s unrivalled superiority over creation, which can be divided into three areas: supremacy over humanity, over nature and over other gods. We will explore these in order.

‘I am the LORD’ declares the Lord’s supremacy over humanity. The Lord’s supremacy over man is first seen in his claim to be the creator of humanity. When Moses objects that he cannot speak well, the Lord asks, ‘Who made the mouth of a man? . . . I am the LORD, no?’ (Exod. 4:11, my tr.). This first appearance of ‘I am the LORD’ is easily missed in English translations, for, readily apparent in Hebrew, the statement is difficult to render as an interrogative into English and preserve intact (as the awkward translation above suggests). In a rhetorical response to Moses’ misgivings about his speech, the Lord assures Moses that he made Moses as he is, and therefore can enable him to carry out this calling. The assurance is grounded in the Lord’s being the creator.

The Lord’s supremacy over man is further apparent in his interaction with Pharaoh, perhaps best represented by 14:4: ‘And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.’ This verse speaks to the Lord’s supremacy over humanity in two different ways. First, 14:4 alludes to the Lord’s supremacy over Pharaoh, evident in his ability to harden Pharaoh’s heart. Although there has been much discussion concerning the relationship between the Lord’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart and

Pharaoh’s hardening his own heart,²⁹ the narrative makes it clear that the Lord controls Pharaoh’s heart.³⁰ Secondly, 14:4 addresses the Lord’s supremacy over the Egyptian army. As we will see in our discussion of Exodus 15, Exodus portrays the crossing of the sea as a military conflict between Egypt and the Lord in which the Lord triumphs, with no hint that he suffers at all in the battle, or that the outcome is ever in doubt. Not only is the Lord supreme over an individual ruler, but he is supreme over that ruler’s army. ‘I am Yahweh’ would convey that even the armies of nations cannot withstand the Lord’s power to exercise his will.

‘I am the LORD’ declares the Lord’s supremacy over nature. That ‘I am the LORD’ communicates the Lord’s mastery over nature can be seen most explicitly where knowledge that ‘I am the LORD’ is given as an intended result of a particular plague (7:17; 8:22[18]; cf. 8:10[6]; 9:14, 29). The plague narrative is fraught with indications that the Lord, not Pharaoh, is supreme over nature. For instance, dramatic actions demonstrate unambiguously that the plagues were the Lord’s doing: the river became blood after Aaron smote the Nile with a rod,³¹ Moses threw dust into the air to inaugurate the plague of boils in Pharaoh’s presence (9:10), he stretched out his hands over the land to bring the locusts (10:13) and the darkness (10:22), and he stretched his staff towards the heavens to bring the hail (9:23). Precise predictions concerning an upcoming plague, including its beginning and/or ending also demonstrate the Lord’s precise control over nature (8:9[5]; 8:23[19]; 8:29[25]; 9:5; 9:18; 9:29). The Lord further demonstrates his command over nature by controlling precisely the extent of a particular plague by making a distinction between Israel and Egypt (8:22–23[18–19]; 9:26; 11:7; 10:23; 12:23). While still refusing to submit to the Lord’s command to release Israel, even Pharaoh acknowledges the Lord’s power in

²⁹ It is, of course, well recognized that Exodus attributes Pharaoh’s hardening both to Pharaoh (8:15[11]; 8:32[28]; 9:34; 13:15) and to the Lord (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1; 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 7, 17), and often simply comments that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19[15]; 9:7, 35). For recent attempts to relate these differing conceptions, see particularly Beale 1984; Childs 1974: 170–175; Cassuto 1967: 54–58; Fretheim 1991a: 96–103; Gunn 1982; Räisänen 1976; Wilson 1979.

³⁰ See particularly 4:21 and 7:3, both of which suggest beforehand that it is the Lord who hardens Pharaoh’s heart. Cf. Noth (1962: 68), who contends that, based on 7:3, ‘We shall have to assume the narrator to mean that right from the beginning it was only Yahweh who was really at work.’

³¹ Note that the Lord tells Pharaoh that he himself will strike the river with the staff ‘in my hand’, even though the river was struck by Aaron (7:19–20).

As has been noted by several interpreters, this demonstration of control over nature points to the Lord as the creator. Zevit has drawn connections between the plagues and creation in Genesis 1–2, arguing that the plague account is carefully structured to make this very point. The end of the plague narrative, he argues, shows a land without people, animals and vegetation, ‘[a] land in which creation was undone’ (Zevit 1976: 210). Fretheim likewise sees creation as the fundamental background of the plagues, arguing that the conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh comes from the fact that Pharaoh’s sin is ‘anticreation’: that is, Pharaoh’s attempt to curb Israel’s growth goes against God’s creational purposes. Because Pharaoh’s sin is anti-creational, the Lord’s response to judge Egypt by subverting creation to a pre-creation state is possible because, as the Creator, he can. Or, in the words of Dozeman (1996: 119), ‘The [I am Yahweh] motif . . . transforms the exodus into a polemical story whose goal is to confront Pharaoh and the Egyptians with Yahweh’s power as a creator God, who controls all land, including Egypt.’

‘I am the LORD’ declares the Lord’s supremacy over other gods. Finally, ‘I am the LORD’ was intended to communicate that the Lord has unrivalled power over all other gods. The phrase is explicitly connected to the Lord’s supremacy over other gods only in 12:12, where the Lord declares that, in bringing death upon the firstborn, ‘on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD’. Whether ‘execute judgments’ is best understood as punishing Egypt’s gods for Israel’s oppression, as referring to a display of divine power, or both, the inescapable implication of the phrase is that the Lord

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34 Cf. Num. 33:4. While 12:12 is the only verse that explicitly mentions other gods in connection with ‘I am the LORD’, several related passages imply the Lord’s superiority over other gods. For instance, in 8:10[6] Moses pledged to remove the frogs, that ‘you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God’. In 9:14 the signs were sent that ‘you may know there is none like me in all the land’. The lack of a specific referent in each verse gives the contrast with other beings the widest possible scope, which would include other gods among those who cannot be compared to the Lord. The explicit reference to other gods in 12:12 and 15:11 (cf. 20:2–5; 22:20; 23:32; 34:11–16) shows that Exodus is aware of other gods, and thus provides solid warrant to see 8:10[6] and 9:14 as including other gods as among those who cannot compare to the Lord.

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is incomparable, supreme over the gods of Egypt.\textsuperscript{35} As Zevit (1976: 198) wisely observes, ‘The fact that plagues did affect the Egyptians adversely led to an intertwining of the two motives, but, as has been mentioned above, for Pr [the writer] their significance did not lie in their destructive aspect but in their heuristic one.’\textsuperscript{36}

The implications of the Lord’s supremacy over all creation are severalfold. First, the Lord claims authority over Egypt. That the plagues implicitly point to the Lord as the Creator becomes particularly important, for it establishes his rightful ownership and rule over the earth. The goal of the hailstorm is the purpose of all the plagues: ‘that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s’ (9:29). Whether the Hebrew word ḫāʾāres (earth, land) refers to the whole earth or just the land of Egypt, the force is the same: despite the pretensions of Pharaoh or the Egyptian gods, Egypt belongs to the Lord. Psalm 24 articulates later what is implicit in the exodus accounts:

\begin{quote}
The earth [ḥāʾāres] is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, 
the world and those who dwell therein, 
for he has founded it upon the seas 
and established it upon the rivers. 

(Ps. 24:1–2; cf. 95:3–5)
\end{quote}

Why does the whole earth belong to the Lord? Because he is the Creator.

Secondly, the supremacy of the Lord exposes Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt as helpless to save. The division between Israel and Egypt declares simultaneously that Pharaoh and the Egyptian gods cannot protect their people or land, while the continued welfare of Israel in the midst of disaster declares that the Lord can do both. Again, the connection between the Lord as Creator and his ability to save is not incidental, but rather imperative, and expressed elsewhere in the Scriptures. ‘Have you not known? Have you not heard? / The LORD is the everlasting God, / the Creator of the ends of the earth’ (Isa. 40:28) is a word of comfort to a captive people, and articulates the foundation of Israel’s confidence in the Lord’s promise to deliver them. Or, negatively, Jeremiah declares, ‘The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens’ (Jer. 10:11). The Lord’s might to save and

\textsuperscript{35} See e.g. Propp 1998: 399–400; Goldingay 2003: 321.

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Greenberg 1971b.
the impotence of false gods go hand in hand. We will return to this point below.

*God is good: the Lord is the God of Israel*
Not only does the Lord’s name suggest that he is God, supreme over all, but it suggests that, in a particular way, the Lord is the God of Israel. This is first apparent, of course, in the initial revelation of the name in Exodus, where the Lord reveals himself to be ‘the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’ (Exod. 3:15–16). Just as the Lord communicated the meaning of his name through mighty acts meant to declare his greatness, so also the name suggests covenantal loyalty to Israel. The Lord’s declaration that he is the God of the patriarchs harkens back to the promises made in Genesis:

I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. (Gen. 17:7–8)

Here the promise contains both a provision of a home and a special relationship with the Lord as their God, throughout the generations.

What is particularly interesting about the above passage is that it is introduced by the Lord’s appearing to Abraham as *El Shaddai*: ‘I am God Almighty’ (Gen. 17:1). Returning to Exodus 6:3, the Lord makes it clear that he appeared to the patriarchs as *El Shaddai*, but did not make himself known as Yahweh. This raises the question ‘What will be revealed about God to Israel in the exodus that was not made known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?’

The answer to this question is suggested in Exodus 6. After acknowledging that he did not reveal himself to the patriarchs as Yahweh in 6:3, the Lord immediately does so to Moses. What the Lord will reveal to Israel about himself is stated explicitly, as he tells Moses what to say to Israel: ‘Say therefore to the people of Israel . . . ’ (Exod. 6:6a). The speech can be structured as follows:

A: I am the LORD.
   B: And I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them,
and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 
C: I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 
B': I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. 
A': I am the LORD. (Exod. 6:6b–8)

Several items are worthy of note here. The speech is bracketed by 'I am the LORD,' suggesting that what falls between A and A' lends further definition to the declaration. The structural centre, C, is the goal of the Egyptian deliverance – that the Lord would bring them out from slavery and take them for himself, knowing him as their God. Particularly interesting here is how the Lord defines himself as the God who delivered them from Egypt. While B and B' speak to what the Lord will do on behalf of Israel, in redeeming them from Egypt and bringing them into the land, it is the Egyptian deliverance that takes centre stage, as the Lord defines himself as the one who brought them out of slavery. As we will see later, the Egyptian deliverance becomes the cardinal event that defines the relationship between Israel and her God. What is particularly important here is the recognition that something new is indeed being made known to Israel as the Lord defines his name. The promise of the land had already been given, as had the special covenant between the Lord and Israel, as seen above in Genesis 17:7–8. What is new now, which could not have been known by the patriarchs, is that the Lord would redeem Israel from Egyptian slavery. In other words, in the exodus from Egypt Israel would come to know the Lord as, in the words of 6:6, One who brings out, Deliverer, Redeemer. Before all else, this is what it means for Yahweh to be the God of Israel.

**Greatness, goodness and the judgment of God**

'The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble!' (Ps. 99:1). To this point, we have sought to understand the Lord’s greatness in terms of his

37 In Gen. 15:13–14 the LORD reveals to Abraham that he will bring Abraham’s descendants out of Egyptian slavery, looking ahead to the time when Israel will know the LORD as redeemer.
supremacy, and his goodness in terms of his commitment to the welfare of his people. One issue the exodus forces us to address is the relationship between the character of God and his judgment. How is the Lord’s greatness related to his judgment? Can God be good, and at the same time bring such devastating judgment?

The exodus raises several specific issues that are dealt with throughout the Scriptures. First, the Lord humbles those who exalt themselves. The problem with arrogance is, at bottom, a fundamental misunderstanding of who the Lord is. The plagues communicated that Egypt belonged to the Lord (8:22[18]; 9:29), thereby testifying to the Lord’s rightful authority over Egypt. Pharaoh is not, ultimately, the ruler of Egypt. Rather, he is a vice-regent who rules at the Lord’s pleasure, who in the end serves the Lord, as the manner in which the Lord addresses Pharaoh as his subject suggests. To obey the Lord would require Pharaoh to acknowledge his position of submission and dependence in relationship to the Lord, that he rules at the Lord’s pleasure, and by his permission.

Pharaoh’s humiliation is in large part due to his refusal to learn what Nebuchadnezzar later had to learn, ‘that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will’ (Dan. 4:25, 32). Haughty and at ease, Nebuchadnezzar provides a good illustration of what, ultimately, the Lord required of Pharaoh as the ruler of a people. The Lord’s will for Nebuchadnezzar? ‘Break off your sins by practising righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity’ (Dan. 4:27). However, enamoured of his kingdom and crediting himself with its glory, Nebuchadnezzar must be humbled, and the kingdom is taken from him until he acknowledges that the Lord is king, even over Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar’s praise of the Most High demonstrates that he has learned his proper place:

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,  
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;  
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,  
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven  
and among the inhabitants of the earth;  
and none can stay his hand  
or say to him, ‘What have you done?’

(Dan. 4:34–35)
When Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges that the Lord reigns, his kingdom is restored: 'Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the king of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble' (Dan. 4:37). As a result of his humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar came to know God.\textsuperscript{38} Pharaoh, on the other hand, did not. The words of Psalm 2 get to the heart of the Lord’s expectation of both Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar:

\begin{quote}
Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.  
Serve the \textsc{Lord} with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
\end{quote}

(Ps. 2:10–11)

This leads to the second point. Part of what it means to rule at the Lord's pleasure is to rule righteously, seeking justice and shunning oppression. What is said of Josiah, and what we saw of Nebuchadnezzar above, is true of all kings who know the Lord:

\begin{quote}
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;  
then it was well.  
Is not this to know me?  
declares the \textsc{Lord}.  
\end{quote}

(Jer. 22:16)

While it would be too much to say that rulers of the nations would know the Lord as did the kings of Israel, it is nonetheless incumbent upon kings to rule with justice (see e.g. Amos 1 – 2). Part of what it meant for the Lord to reveal himself to Israel, Egypt and the world would be to make clear that he will not tolerate injustice, particularly the oppression of the vulnerable. And what is true for all peoples is certainly true of Israel in her vulnerability. As the \textsc{Lord} declared in his initial missionary call to Abraham, 'I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse' (Gen. 12:3).

The plagues make clear God’s intolerance of oppression. As discussed above, the situation from which Israel was delivered was severe physical oppression and the murder of their infant boys.

\textsuperscript{38} While Nebuchadnezzar never speaks the Lord’s name, he does refer to the God of Heaven or the Most High God, whom he knows as the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
Both the first and last disasters call to mind Pharaoh’s murderous decree: the Nile turning to blood, having claimed the lives of infants thrown in, and the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt. Perhaps less explicitly, the livelihood of Egypt, much of which was built upon the backs of Israel, was systematically destroyed, with Israel leaving with Egyptian wealth, such that Exodus comments, ‘Thus they plundered the Egyptians’ (12:36). Important to note is that these judgments were public judgments, making it clear to Israel, Egypt and the world that the Lord would not tolerate the oppression of Israel. This also is what it means to know the Lord, for in failure to bring judgment for Egypt’s oppression of Israel, the Lord runs the risk of being misunderstood as either unwilling or unable to deal with such oppression. Thus, to borrow Paul’s words concerning the cross, the judgment against Egypt ‘was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he passed over former sins’ (Rom. 3:25).³⁹

The need to make a public statement of judgment may help explain the controversial notion of the Lord’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart, so that judgment may be complete and the Lord not misunderstood. The Lord will publicly humble Pharaoh, he will judge Egypt for her oppression and he will redeem Israel. And, in so doing, the world will come to know the Lord, and what kind of God he is.

This leads to the third implication of God’s greatness and goodness: other gods can’t save. Whatever the nature of the gods of Egypt, neither they nor Pharaoh could deliver Egypt from the disasters that befell her. Pharaoh implicitly acknowledges this by turning to Moses, rather than to his own magicians, for relief from the plagues. That some in Egypt learned this lesson is apparent in several ways. The first acknowledgment of the Lord’s superior power comes early in the succession of signs, as the Egyptian magicians become aware that the Lord can do things that they cannot (8:19). As the disasters continue for Egypt (while Israel is protected), some begin to heed the word of the Lord, as illustrated in Egypt’s response to the announcement of the coming hail:

Whoever feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh hurried his slaves and his livestock into the houses, but whoever did not pay attention to the word of the Lord left his slaves and his livestock in the field. (9:20–21)

³⁹ The Lord’s making himself known through judgment is particularly evident in Ezekiel, where coming to know ‘I am the Lord’ is the central thrust of the book.
As the plagues continue, Pharaoh’s servants understand what needs to be done, and press Pharaoh to release Israel: ‘Let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God. Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?’ (10:7). Whether or not this suggests a full submission to the will of God, it is clear that the servants of Pharaoh were well aware that only Moses’ God could halt the plagues. In the acknowledgment that the Lord brings calamity is the implicit hope that the Lord brings deliverance.

The most important way in which Egypt understood this lesson is an inference we can make concerning the last disaster, the death of the firstborn. While it must be acknowledged that the text does not say this explicitly, there are good grounds to suggest that some Egyptians were delivered from the final plague. First, the means of deliverance was not nationality, per se, but rather the presence of blood over the doors of each house that responded to the Lord’s command. Secondly, as we have seen, before the coming of the hail there were Egyptians who were already responding to the word of the Lord. Finally, Exodus 12:38 tells us that a ‘mixed multitude’ left Egypt. That this mixed multitude did not refer to Israel is apparent, for the text explicitly speaks of the Israelite men, women and children, and the mixed multitude with them. It is clear, then, that whoever this group of people was, they were not Israelite. Given that Exodus gives no hint of other peoples living in Egypt (be that as it may), it is probably a reference that includes Egyptians. If this is the case, then the plagues not only served as a means of judgment, but also as a means of mercy, that the Egyptians might come to know the Lord as God, and in so doing find refuge from the judgment that was to come upon the whole land. The wider biblical parallels – a universal judgment coming, from which one might find refuge through identification with the people of God, and sheltered by blood – are plain.

Israel’s continued acknowledgment: ceremonies of deliverance

The importance of knowing the Lord as Redeemer is further emphasized in the institution of the ceremonies of Israel’s deliverance: the Passover (12:1–13), the Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:14–20; 13:3–10) and the Consecration of the Firstborn (13:1–2, 11–16). Although the position of these ceremonies in the narrative has struck many as awkward, their appearance here supports the inference that the Lord is now known to Israel as Redeemer.
The three ceremonies have much in common. First, they all commemorate the death of the firstborn in Egypt, the plague that finally broke Egypt and brought about Israel’s deliverance. The Passover commemorates the Lord’s protecting Israel from the destroyer (12:23), the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorates the hasty flight from Egypt that same night (12:17), and the practice of redeeming the firstborn memorializes the Lord’s killing the firstborn in Egypt (13:14–15). Secondly, each ceremony serves as a memorial for future generations. For each, the Lord gives explicit instruction concerning how the feasts are to be explained to Israel’s descendants, indicating the importance of remembering and faithfully interpreting the events. The interpretations of each ceremony are remarkably similar. In addition to each crediting the Lord with Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, two explicitly recall the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (Passover, 12:25–27; Consecration of Firstborn, 13:14–15), while two credit the Lord for delivering Israel with a strong hand (Unleavened Bread, 13:8–10; Consecration of Firstborn, 13:14–15).

The interpretations of the ceremonies are not designed, however, simply to impart information to generations removed from the exodus. Rather, the ceremonies draw future generations and the events of the exodus together, so that Israel’s descendants might, through ritual, participate in the Egyptian deliverance. In each case the Israelites are bidden to re-enact an event that happened on the night of the exodus: Passover through the consumption of the lamb in haste (dressed accordingly), Unleavened Bread through the eating of unleavened bread akin to that which had not risen when Israel left Egypt in haste, and Consecration of the Firstborn through the sacrifice or redemption of the firstborn, because the Lord killed the firstborn of Egypt. The purpose of this ritual re-enactment, however, is not simply to remember a past event through drama, but rather to bring the past and the present together for subsequent generations. Childs (1962: 66–70) has argued that the noun zikkārōn (memorial), which describes both the Passover (12:14) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (13:9), has an active sense that points to something beyond itself as worthy of remembrance. As he writes (1962:

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40 The significance of these events is supported by the severity of punishment for eating leaven during Unleavened Bread (12:15, 19; cf. Num. 9:9–14) and in the Lord’s declaring the month of the exodus to be the first month, which Durham (1987: 153) sees as signifying both the start of the calendar year and the theological importance of the events associated with it.
68) concerning 12:14, 'The particular concern of the P [Priestly] writer is not the reliving of a past historical event so much as the maintaining of a reality which indeed entered history, but is now an eternal ordinance.'\textsuperscript{41} To observe the ceremonies was to participate in the events themselves. Applied to the ceremonies of the exodus, Hendel's reference to Faulkner is apt: 'The past is never dead. It's not even past.'\textsuperscript{42}

The need for Israelites to know the Lord as their redeemer becomes evident in a myriad of ways through the Bible, perhaps well illustrated in a survey of a few psalms. The psalmist of Psalm 77 finds comfort in his despair precisely by remembering the wondrous works of the Lord in delivering Israel from Egypt, and taking the same lesson his ancestors did on the other side of the sea: 'What god is great like our God?' (Ps. 77:13). Psalm 78 speaks to the importance of remembering for the sake of obedience. Beginning with a pledge to 'tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done' (v. 4), the psalmist gives the reason: 'they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments' (v. 7). Psalm 106 looks at this issue from the side of unfaithfulness through a historical lesson from the Egyptian deliverance. Having described the drowning of the Egyptian army, the psalmist declares that 'they believed his words; / they sang his praise. / But they soon forgot his works' (106:12–13; cf. Exod. 14:31 – 15:1), leading to their murmurings in the wilderness, the opposition to Moses, and the worship of the golden calf. 'They forgot God, their Saviour, / who had done great things in Egypt' (106:21). In each case the psalmist makes plain that the faithfulness of the succeeding generations lies in remembering the great things the Lord has done for them. In Israel's continued participation in the exodus event, through these ceremonies, the future generations would know the Lord as their redeemer.

\textsuperscript{41} Mann (1996: 242) goes a step further: 'The Passover narrative is arguably the most important section of the entire book because it is primarily here that the experience of exodus is communicated not simply as a moment in historical time (in the past) but as a perennially recurring moment in the present life of these for whom the story is sacred. ... The Passover narrative elicits a communion between past and present, and joins past and present together in anticipation of the future.'

The name known (Exod. 15)

Whereas Exodus 1 introduces the conflict between the Lord and Pharaoh, Exodus 15 concludes it. While questions concerning tradition history and dating have dominated much modern study of Exodus 15, the song has an important theological function of demonstrating what Israel came to know of the Lord during the Egyptian deliverance. To this point we have seen how communicating 'I am the LORD' was the underlying reason for the Lord's actions in the Egyptian deliverance. Now, for the first time, Israel herself proclaims, '[T]he LORD is his name!' (15:3). Israel now knows the name of the Lord. But what did that mean to Israel? What did Israel learn of the Lord in the Egyptian deliverance? Canonically speaking, Exodus 15:1–21 is Israel's response to the Lord's intention that Israel know that 'I am the LORD.' Because the song speaks to what Israel learned of the Lord, it can therefore serve to test the inferences we have made to this point concerning what the name of the Lord was meant to communicate to Israel.

We begin with the short exclamation, in Hebrew parallelism, 'The LORD is a man of war; / the LORD is his name' (15:3) and ask what it meant for Israel to understand the Lord as a man of war. As we have seen beginning in Exodus 1:8, the conflict is not firstly between Israel and Egypt, but the Lord and Egypt, now reiterated in Exodus 15 as Egypt is referred to as the Lord's enemy. Israel came to know the Lord as a man of war, who overcame his enemies for the salvation of Israel.

The implications of such an understanding are severalfold. First, Israel knew the Lord as her redeemer. As Moses sings, 'The LORD is my strength and my song, / and he has become my salvation' (15:2), the implication being that Israel understood her deliverance to be the sole work of the Lord. While there is abundant praise for the Lord in defeating the Egyptians, there is no hint in the poem that Israel contributed to the Lord's victory. The east wind of 14:21 becomes the wind of Yahweh's nostrils in 15:8, Moses plays no active role (it is the right hand of God extended over the waters, 15:12) and there

43 Although see Smith 1997: 205–218; Watts 1992: 41–62. Noting the emphasis on critical questions, Childs (1974: 248) writes, 'An equally important and usually neglected exegetical task is to analyze the composition in its final stage. Regardless of its prehistory, the fundamental issue is to determine the effect of joining the poem to the preceding narrative.'
is no mention of an angel, a cloud or any other intermediary. This understanding of ultimate agency renders curious Fretheim’s (1989: 36, emphasis original) reflections on the plagues:

The divine working in nature is usually in coordination with human activity. Hence, the use of the rod by Moses/Aaron in the plagues or at the sea crossing or in the wilderness is an integral element in what happens in the natural order. . . . There is a complex understanding of agency in connection with each of the plagues. Moses and Aaron would not be effective without God’s power working in and through them, and God is dependent upon Moses and Aaron, working in the world of nature in and through that which is not divine.

Aside from the logical fallacy that finds the Lord’s use of human activity to indicate dependence upon human agency, the fact that Exodus 15 nowhere mentions human agency suggests that Israel understood her role in the exodus to be immaterial. The idea that the Lord was in any manner dependent upon human assistance in the exodus is foreign to the thought of both Exodus 15 as well as the plague narrative itself. In fact, the lavish nature of the praise given the Lord is precisely due to the fact that Israel understood the Lord to be solely responsible for Pharaoh’s defeat. As seen above, the conflict is portrayed from the beginning of Exodus as between the Lord (not Israel) and Pharaoh. That this conflict is resolved by the Lord alone is recognized by all parties: Moses exhorts Israel, ‘The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent’ (14:14), the Egyptians recognize that ‘the LORD fights for them’ (14:25), and the narrator comments that ‘the LORD threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea’ (14:27). According to the song of Exodus 15, the Lord is the warrior (15:3), the Egyptians are his enemies (15:7) and it is the Lord’s arm that wrought the victory (15:1–2, 4, 6–8, 10, 12).

The corollary to Israel’s recognition of the Lord as her redeemer

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44 Sarna 1991: 75.
45 Furthermore, it is not the case, as Fretheim suggests, that there is human participation in ‘each’ of the plagues (cf. 8:24[20]; 9:6, where the Lord is the only agent).
46 Jacob (1992: 418) contrasts Exod. 15, with its theocentric perspective, with the victory song of Judg. 5, which exalts human participation (cf. Hauser 1987). On a broader level, Noth (1981: 47) observes that, in Israel’s faith-statement that God led Israel out of Egypt, ‘God is regularly the grammatical or, at least, the logical subject, and it is equally remarkable that “Israel” as a totality always appears as the object.’
is seeing herself as a people redeemed: 'the people whom you have redeemed' (15:13), and 'The people . . . whom you have purchased' (15:16). Redemption now defines what it means for Israel to be the Lord's people, and for the Lord to be their God. The relationship between Israel and the Lord articulated in Exodus 6:7 has taken effect:

I will bring you out . . . I will deliver you . . . I will redeem you . . . I will take you to be my people, and I will your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Exod. 6:6–7)

Now, the people have been redeemed, so that they might be God's people, dwelling with him in his sanctuary (15:13, 17). In fact, it is here that Israel first explicitly acknowledges the Lord as her God (15:2), the acknowledgment of the redeemed to the redeemer.

Secondly, Israel came to know the Lord as supreme above all gods and earthly rulers, one of the primary purposes of 'I am the LORD' to this point in Exodus. The Lord's defeat of Pharaoh is the inevitable outcome of who he is.

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?  
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,\(^{47}\) awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?  

(15:11)

The statement of incomparability is particularly important in the light of the fact that other gods are mentioned explicitly only in 12:12 (and implicitly in 8:10[6] and 9:14). Israel's declaration of Yahweh's supremacy over other gods in 15:11 demonstrates that the Lord's supremacy over other gods is at stake in chapters 3–14, despite the fact that other gods are rarely mentioned.\(^{48}\) Likewise, Israel came to recognize that no earthly ruler compares to the Lord, as is clear in their exultant claim that the nations (Philistia, Edom,

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\(^{47}\) The phrase *ne'dar baqōdeš* can be translated 'majestic among the holy ones' (cf. Ps. 89:5; Job 5:1; 15:15), which Sarna (1991: 80, 248) suggests may be another reference to other gods.

\(^{48}\) This inference is further confirmed later in 18:11 in Jethro's confession upon hearing of the Lord's mighty deeds against Egypt: 'Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods.' Jethro's confession will be treated in greater detail in chapter 3.
Canaan) will fear the greatness of the Lord. The events of the exodus communicated that the Lord was like no other (cf. e.g. Deut. 4:34–35; Ps. 135).

The implications of understanding the Lord’s supremacy reach beyond the events of the exodus, giving Israel confidence in her God. If the Lord were simply superior to Egypt, there would be no grounds for confidence in the face of another threat. This is precisely the mistake of the Rabshakeh, who sought to discourage Hezekiah by speaking of Israel’s God as another national deity, who in the end would be unable to rescue Judah from the Assyrian king. Hezekiah, however, knew the Lord as Israel came to know him after the exodus:

O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth . . . O LORD our God, save us, please, from [the Assyrian king], that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone. (2 Kgs 19:15–19; cf. Isa. 37:16–20)

It is precisely the supremacy of God over all that brings assurance and courage to Israel, regardless of the enemy. In fact, the deliverance from Egypt became paradigmatic for the Lord’s ultimate redemption of Israel, prophecy couched in the very language of Exodus 15:

Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. (Isa. 12:2)

The prophets can comfort Israel centuries hence precisely because ‘the LORD will reign for ever and ever’ (Exod. 15:18). He is for ever known as the redeemer of his people.

Conclusion: concerning Exodus 6:3

We now return to Exodus 6:3. As has been indicated above, if the source-critical hypothesis is not taken, the apparent newness of the name Yahweh in Exodus must somehow be accounted for.
Therefore the question becomes, what does the Lord make known about himself that was not known to the patriarchs? What about the character of the Lord is genuinely new in the experience of Israel?

As we have seen, one of the primary burdens of 'I am the LORD' was to reveal that the Lord is supreme, in such a way not yet apparent in Genesis. While Genesis speaks of the Lord's receiving worship, and being the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, nowhere in Genesis does the Lord explicitly demand exclusive worship, nor is the Lord compared to other gods. The book of Exodus exhibits a marked change in this perspective, introducing a polemic against other gods and authorities absent in Genesis. The plague accounts in Exodus are explicitly designed to reveal the Lord as supreme not only over Pharaoh, and but over all creation, and in so doing to expose all else, including other gods, as inferior and insufficient.

The display of the Lord's supremacy, however, serves a particular end, the redemption of Israel from slavery. The meaning of the name is not exhausted by recognizing his supremacy, for 'I am the LORD' intends to communicate that the Lord is the God of Israel. Throughout Exodus, the Lord is known as the God of a particular people, and is not known apart from them. Each plague is designed, not only to demonstrate the Lord's supremacy, but to force Pharaoh to free Israel from slavery. Indeed, it is precisely Pharaoh's pledge to release Israel that stops a particular plague, and the reversal of his decision that brings another. The message that the Lord intends to free Israel, bringing judgment upon Egypt in the process, is not lost on the Egyptians, who increasingly become aware that the Lord is Israel's God. In fact, as discussed above, it seems likely that some Egyptians, as part of the mixed multitude that left Egypt, came to know the Lord as their redeemer as well, as they joined the people of Israel and obeyed the command to apply blood to their doorposts.

These revelations of the Lord as supreme and redeemer are, of course, inseparable, for the supremacy of the Lord is the foundation for his redeeming of Israel. The corollary of the display of the Lord's greatness in Genesis is the exposure of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt as futile and unable to save. The supremacy of the Lord ensures Israel that their God can deliver. 'O God, save me by your name, / and vindicate me by your might' (Ps. 54:1). 'The name of the LORD is a strong tower' (Prov. 18:10).

This connection between the supremacy of the Lord and his being the Redeemer of his people is both logical and biblical. Psalm 115 is
an excellent example of how the name of the Lord simultaneously speaks to the supremacy of God and his desire to redeem:

Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, 
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!

Why should the nations say, 
‘Where is their God?’
Our God is in the heavens; 
he does all that he pleases.

Their idols are silver and gold, 
the work of human hands. 
They have mouths, but do not speak; 
eyes, but do not see. 
They have ears, but do not hear; 
noses, but do not smell. 
They have hands, but do not feel; 
feet, but do not walk; 
and they do not make a sound in their throat.
Those who make them become like them; 
so do all who trust in them.

O Israel, trust in the LORD! 
He is their help and their shield. 
O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD! 
He is their help and their shield. 
You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! 
He is their help and their shield.

The LORD has remembered us; he will bless us; 
he will bless the house of Israel; 
he will bless the house of Aaron; 
he will bless those who fear the LORD, 
both the small and the great.

(Ps. 115:1–13)

Three things are noteworthy in the light of our reading of Exodus. First, the psalm is explicitly about glorifying the name of the Lord, and for a reason – for his steadfast love and faithfulness. Secondly, the Lord is supreme, doing everything he pleases, unlike the gods of
the nations who can do nothing, and therefore cannot be trusted. Thirdly, because of the Lord’s power and his love for his people, Israel can trust the Lord, as one willing and able to secure their good. Finally, there may be a hint of the kind of broader application that the exodus suggests. The blessing upon Israel, the house of Aaron and those who fear the Lord may not be simple parallelism, but may rather suggest that, as the Lord is the shield of Israel, he is likewise the shield of all who fear him, regardless of nationality. If so, the suggestion fits the Egyptian deliverance. Pharaoh does not fear the Lord’s bringing judgment upon Egypt (‘But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God,’ Exod. 9:30). Yet there appear to be some Egyptians who learn to fear the Lord. The comment on the plague of hail reveals two kinds of Egyptians: those who feared the Lord and brought their animals under cover, and others who did not pay attention to the Lord’s word (9:20–21; cf. 10:7–8). The mixed multitude that left Egypt presumably included Egyptians, those who feared the Lord, and therefore obeyed his word. If so, the blood of the lamb protected their firstborn. The Lord was their shield, the redeemer of those who trust him.

The name of the Lord indicating redemption does not stop in the OT, but spans the entirety of Scripture. Two examples will suffice. First, in what has become known as the high priestly prayer in John 17, Jesus defines his ministry in terms of God’s name. Not only does Jesus confess to the Father, ‘I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world’ (17:6; cf. v. 26), but he prays, ‘Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me’ (17:11). And what is that name? Distinctive in John is the manner in which Jesus takes ‘I am’ upon his lips, applying the exact words of Exodus 3:14 (LXX) to himself, and continuing to fill with content the question that the name begs. One of the striking features of the way Jesus uses ‘I am’ is that in almost every instance he refers to life. In the seven well-known ‘I am’ statements Jesus speaks of himself as ‘bread of life’ (6:48), ‘the light of the world’ who brings life to those who follow him (8:12), ‘the door’ entering through which leads to abundant life (10:9–10), ‘the good shepherd’ who lays down his life so that his sheep may be protected and live (10:11–15), ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (14:6), and ‘the vine’ to whom the disciples must be connected if they are to live and bear fruit (15:1–6). In each case Jesus refers to the need to be delivered from death, whether articulated in terms of hunger, darkness, enemies or even
God himself as the vinedresser who cuts away the barren branch. Similarly, in Jesus’ words to the Jews the name suggests salvation: ‘unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins’ (8:24). Jesus’ words to his storm-weary disciples struggling in the boat, translated ‘It is I; do not be afraid’ by the ESV, is a word of comfort using ‘I am’ from the one who walks towards them and will deliver them (6:20; cf. Matt. 14:27; Mark 6:50). As we saw of the name in Exodus, likewise in John. The name of the Lord, the name given to Jesus, points to salvation.

Secondly, in a cardinal passage that speaks of the Lord as both incomparable and redeemer, Isaiah writes:

Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!
For I am God, and there is no other.

By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
‘To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.’

Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me,
are righteousness and strength . . .

(Isa. 45:22–24a)

This is a word offering salvation, salvation for all the earth through the Lord, and only the Lord. Yet, as we know from the great hymn of Philippians 2, it is the name of Jesus to which every knee will bow and swear allegiance. The angel’s words to Joseph ‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins’ (Matt. 1:21) are given practical expression in the willingness of the Son to empty himself, even to death on a cross, precisely for the salvation of his people, and the glory of the Father. The name Jesus, like ‘the Lord’ in the OT, signifies sovereignty, for every knee will bow. And it signifies redemption.

The name that was unknown to the patriarchs, then, was not the label, but rather the character of the Lord as the supreme redeemer, a characteristic of the Lord that Israel had not known, and could not have known apart from being delivered from bondage. In this way yes, Israel came to know the name of the Lord as one who fulfills his promises. But far more than learning that the Lord was faithful to
his word, Israel came to know the Lord who is faithful. In fact, the reason that the Lord is faithful to his word is because he is sovereign, and he loves his people. God is great and God is good, indeed. ‘His name is the LORD’ (Ps. 68:4).