OF ALL countries upon the face of the earth Palestine
seems one of the least likely to have produced anything
striking or world shaking. Nevertheless, in Palestine there
appeared a phenomenon the like of which the world has never
seen elsewhere.1 The present day Bedouin of Palestine can
hardly be regarded as the bearers of advanced thought and
culture and there is not much reason to believe that they
differ markedly from some of Palestine's earlier inhabitants.2
Yet in Palestine the most sublime ideas of God and his love
to mankind appeared, and in Palestine alone did the truth
concerning man and his plight make itself known. What is
the explanation of these facts? How are we to account for
the large body of prophets, with their teleological message,
their declaration of a Redeemer to come, forming a mighty,
evergrowing stream that culminated in the person and work
of Jesus Christ?

If we accept the Scriptures at face value we find that they
are filled with references to Moses whom they regard as the
human founder of the theocracy. It was Moses whom God
used to bring his people out of Egyptian bondage and to
give to them his unchanging law. "He made known his ways
unto Moses", we read in Psalm 103, and this is only one of
the testimonies that attributes to Moses the claim that Moses
received his commission by divine revelation. Can we today,
however, simply accept the plain testimony of the Scriptures
as they stand?3 Modern scholarship very largely denies that
we can, and we must give some attention to its claims.

1 Cf. "But when we take it all together, from Abraham and/or Moses
to Jesus and the apostolic Church, it does cohere together; there is a
consistency about it, and as history — not simply some imaginary salva-
tion history — it is without parallel anywhere or at any time in the history
of this planet". Christopher R. North: The Second Isaiah, Oxford, 1964,
p. 27.
2 If some modern reconstructions of Israel's history are correct, the
Israelites on the whole were little more advanced than some of the present
day Bedouin.
3 "Von diesem Bild (i.e., the picture which the Old Testament gives of
Israel's beginnings) hat die einsetzende Bibelkritik manches Element
The Sinai "Tradition"

In the discussion of these questions Professor Gerhard von Rad of Heidelberg University has taken a prominent part. The last one hundred and fifty years of critical historical scholarship, he tells us, have destroyed the picture of Israel's history which the church had derived from its acceptance of the Old Testament. According to critical historical scholarship we can no longer regard it possible that all of Israel was present at Sinai or that as a unit the whole nation crossed the Red Sea or achieved the conquest of Palestine. The picture given to us in Exodus, to be frank, is unhistorical.4

The account of Israel's origin given in the Old Testament, we are told, is extremely complicated, being based upon a few old motifs around which a number of freely circulating traditions have clustered. Both these ancient motifs and the separate traditions were pronouncedly confessionalistic in character.5 We thus have two pictures of Israel's history, that which the faith of Israel has reconstructed and that which modern historical scholarship has reconstructed. It is this latter which tells of "the history as it really was in Israel", for this latter method is rational and "objective" in that it employs historical method and presupposes the similarity of all historical occurrence.6

4 Op. cit., p. 113 (E. T., pp. 106, 107), "Die historisch-kritische Wissenschaft hält es für unmöglich, dass ganz Israel am Sinai war, dass Israel en bloc das Schilfmeer durchschritten und die Landnahme vollzogen hat, sie hält das Bild, das die Überlieferungen des Buches Exodus von Mose und seinem Führeramt zeichnen, für ebenso ungeschichtlich wie die Funktion, die das deuteronomistische Richterbuch den ›Richtern‹ zuschreibt".


6 Op. cit., pp. 113 f. (E. T., p. 107), "Die eine ist rational und ‚objektiv‘, d. h. sie baut mit Hilfe der ‚historischen Methode‘ und unter der Voraussetzung der Gleichartigkeit alles historischen Geschehens an einem kritischen Bild der Geschichte, so wie es in Israel wirklich gewesen ist". With-
Yet historical investigation has its limits; it cannot explain the phenomenon of Israel's faith, and the manner in which Israel's faith presented history is still far from being adequately elucidated. It is this question with which the work of theological investigation is primarily to be concerned.

In the second volume of his work, as a result of criticism, von Rad somewhat dulled the alternatives. In the English translation this particular section is omitted, but it might be well to call attention to the most significant sentence. "The historical method opens for us only one aspect of the many layered phenomenon of history (Geschichte). This is a layer which is not able to say anything about the relationship of the history to God. Even the best attested event of the 'actual history' remains dumb with respect to the divine control of history. Its relevance for faith can in no wise be objectively verified."

It is upon this foundation that von Rad proceeds to consider the early history of Israel. In his penetrating work The Problem of the Hexateuch von Rad had already directed attention to what he called the "Sinai tradition". In this treatise he made a study of Deuteronomy 26:5b-9 which he regarded as a liturgical formula, the earliest recognizable example of a creed. This summary of the facts of redemption, he held, could not have been a freely devised meditation founded upon historical events. Rather, it reflected the traditional form in which the faith is presented. Of particular


interest is the fact that in this "credo" there is no mention of the events which occurred at Mount Sinai.9

Likewise, in Deuteronomy 6:20–24, which, according to von Rad, is also written after the style of a confession of faith, there is no mention of Mount Sinai, and here the omission is said to be more striking inasmuch as in this passage there is express concern about the divine commandments and statutes. Again, in the historical summary Joshua 24:2b–13 ("shot through", says von Rad, "with all kinds of accretions and embellishments which are immediately recognisable as deriving from the hexateuchal presentation of history") the events of Sinai are said to be completely overlooked.10 All three texts follow a canonical pattern of redemption; indeed, the passage from Joshua is said to be a Hexateuch in miniature. The canonical pattern is clear, for in each instance it omits reference to what occurred at Sinai. The Sinai tradition is independent, and only at a very late date did it become combined with the canonical pattern. There were two originally independent traditions.

The Sinai tradition has been secondarily inserted into that of the wilderness wanderings. Wellhausen had asserted that

9 Von Rad's work has not been without influence. Martin Noth (Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch, Darmstadt, 1960, pp. 43, 63–67) finds the Sinai traditions already present in the material available to J. "Erst recht gehört der 'Einbau der Sinaitradition' zu den von J in G schon vorgefundenen Gegebenheiten" (p. 43). Mention may also be made of H. J. Kraus (Gottesdienst in Israel, 2. Aufl., München, 1962, pp. 189–193) who thinks that in the removal of the Shechem cult to Gilgal the fusion of the divergent traditions may have occurred. Cf., also, Leonhard Rost: Das kleine Credo und andere Studien zum Alten Testament, Heidelberg, 1965.

10 "Auch hier ist der Text mit allerlei Floskeln und Zutaten durchsetzt, deren Herkunft aus der hexateu recherisch geschehen sofort erkenntlich ist", Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament, p. 14. The English translation given above is taken from the English translation of this work, p. 7. It may be remarked in passing that von Rad's constant use of the term Hexateuch is thoroughly unbiblical. The classification of the books into a threefold division is due to the position of their author in the Old Testament economy. For this reason, the five books of which Moses was the author stand apart, the base and foundation (despite Wellhausen) upon which the remainder of the Old Testament builds. It is biblical to speak of a Pentateuch, but not of a Tetrateuch (Noth, Engnell) nor of a Hexateuch (Wellhausen, von Rad).
after the crossing of the Red Sea the Israelites marched on to Kadesh, which is really reached when the people come to Massah and Meribah in the vicinity of Kadesh. Hence, the places in the events before Sinai and those in the narratives after Sinai are about the same and the expedition to Sinai is to be regarded as secondary. There is, as von Rad puts it, a break in the Kadesh tradition, which tradition alone is closely interwoven with the exodus story proper.

In the Sinai tradition the predominating elements are the theophany and the making of the covenant, and with these there are bound up less important traditional elements of an aetiological nature which bore no historical relationship to the account of the theophany and the covenant. What part in the life of ancient Israel did this Sinai tradition play?

We may best understand the tradition as a cultic ceremony which was itself prior to the cultus and normative for it. It is the cult legend for a particular cult occasion. The Sinai experience is not something in the past but is a present reality, for "within the framework of the cultus, where past, present, and future acts of God coalesce in the one tremendous actuality of the faith, such a treatment is altogether possible and indeed essential". Thus, the events of Sinai were actualized in the cult. Later Israel could easily identify itself with the Israel of Horeb. It was the material of the ancient Shechem covenant-festival, celebrated at the renewal of the covenants of the Feast of Booths, and incorporated by the "Yahwist" into the Settlement tradition. Only about the time of the exile did the fusion of the two find popular acceptance.

With respect to von Rad's presentation we would remark that the entire Pentateuch does not at all look like a develop-

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11 At this point von Rad appeals to Wellhausen, *op. cit.*, p. 21 (E. T., pp. 13, 14).
12 "Nur der erstere (i. e., the Kadesh tradition) ist aufs engste mit der eigentlichen Auszugsgeschichte verwoben; der andere (i. e., the Sinai tradition) nicht, wie das ja auch der Sprung zwischen Ex. 34 und Num. 10, 29 ff. zeigt" (*op. cit.*, pp. 21 f., E. T., p. 14).
14 Ibid.
ment or overworking of the cultic credo supposedly found in Deuteronomy 26:5b-9.\textsuperscript{16}

With respect to Deuteronomy 26:5b–9 there is no evidence that it was ever recited at the Gilgal sanctuary at the time of the Feast of Weeks. The action described in this passage is to be performed when the nation enters the land which God will give it. The singular has individualizing force. "Yahweh, who is thy God", we may paraphrase, "will give the land to thee". Emphasis falls upon divine grace. The land is not taken by Israel's power but is a gift of her God. Indeed, the word הָוָה הָאָרֶץ implies that Israel knew why she was receiving the land. It seems to reflect upon preceding events.

The purpose of the confession is to show that from a small people which entered Egypt and were evilly entreated by the Egyptians the nation became great and powerful. Hence, they cried unto the Lord, and the Lord by mighty wonders brought them out of Egypt unto the place where they now are.\textsuperscript{17}

Is not the reason for the omission of reference to events at Sinai clear? Moses wishes to stress the great contrast between the nation's present position of safety and blessing and its former state of servitude and to bring into prominence the fact that God has brought this change about by means of a mighty act of deliverance. To have introduced at this point the events of Sinai would simply obscure this contrast.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} The more one considers von Rad's position, the more apparent does it become that one cannot begin with Deuteronomy 26:5b–9 and from there work as he does to the completed Pentateuch. The whole procedure is based upon fantasy, not fact, and upon acceptance of an unnatural, unrealistic, humorless documentary analysis which does not begin to do justice to the true nature of the Pentateuch. Cf. Oswald T. Allis: The Five Books of Moses, Philadelphia, 1949. There is a unity in the Pentateuch which is best explained as the work of one mind.

Artur Weiser (The Old Testament: Its Formation and Development, New York, 1961, p. 85) points out that the Pentateuch is essentially different from an expanded hymn-like prayer or creed.

\textsuperscript{17} The priest mentioned is not the high priest but simply a priest in charge of the altar whose duty was to receive gifts of sacrifice. The first fruits constituted a proof that Israel was in possession of her land, and in offering these the Israelite acknowledged his indebtedness to the Lord for giving him the land.

\textsuperscript{18} Weiser (op. cit., p. 86) holds that the subject matter of the "Sinai
Von Rad’s argument actually proves too much. If absence of the Sinai episode really shows that the Sinai “tradition” was not an integral, original, part of the Exodus “tradition” then the same conclusion follows with respect to the events at Kadesh. Deuteronomy 26:5-9 says not a word about Kadesh. Are we therefore to conclude that the events at Kadesh were not an original element in the Exodus “traditions”? For that matter the entire fact of the wilderness wanderings is passed over in silence in the Deuteronomy passage, and we are simply told that the Lord “brought us unto this place”.

Is the entire wilderness episode therefore a separate tradition? If we grant von Rad’s premises, we may consistently exclude the whole time of the wilderness journey from the original “tradition” and not merely the events at Mount Sinai.

Von Rad’s appeal to Deuteronomy 6 is singularly unfortunate, for this passage does contain an express reference to the events at Sinai. It is intended to answer the question posed in verse 20, “what are the testimonies, and the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God commanded you?” In answer Moses contrasts the period of Egyptian servitude and the present condition brought about by means of the mighty deliverance of the Lord. This time, however, it is expressly stated that “the Lord commanded us to do these statutes.” When did the Lord give such a command

tradition is not a historical event in the same sense as the historical events of the exodus and entry; it is on the contrary an encounter with God which leads up to the acceptance by the people of the will of God proclaimed in the commandments; and in its cultic setting it represents a particular action in the course of the festival. Consequently it is not mentioned in the same breath with God’s acts of salvation in those texts which are concerned only with the latter. ... it (i.e., no mention of Sinai) is due to the fact that they (i.e., certain texts) restrict themselves to the recital of the saving acts in history on grounds which make it clear that their silence concerning the Sinai tradition cannot be used as an argumentum e silentio for the reconstruction of the whole contents of the festival cult, as is done by von Rad.”
if it was not at Sinai? This very statement is a reflection upon the events at Sinai. True enough, the word Sinai is not mentioned, but is it necessary? The disjunction between the Sinai and Conquest traditions, which von Rad thinks is supported by this passage, therefore, is illusory.

Unfortunate also is the appeal to Joshua 24, for this passage reflects both upon the Sinai "traditions" and also upon the so-called "Conquest traditions". This fact has been clearly demonstrated by Artur Weiser who finds that the two sets of tradition are here already combined and "are clearly regarded as belonging essentially together because they supplement each other". Verses 2–13 are a recital of God's historical dealings with his people, pointing out how God had been with them since the time of the patriarchs and had brought them unto the present. In verses 14–26, however, we have the response of the nation to the plea to obey the covenant. These latter verses presuppose that God has given his commandments to the nation. Weiser goes so far as to say that this manner of speech (i.e., God speaking in the first person singular) shows "the original connexion between God's revelation of his nature in his saving acts in history and his revelation of his will leading up to the pledge of the congregation". In this passage history and law are bound up together as they are in the Pentateuch generally.

\[\text{Op. cit., p. 8} \]
\[\text{Op. cit., p. 8} \]

In a recent article, "The Exodus, Sinai and the Credo" (Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. XXVII, 1965, pp. 101–113) Herbert B. Huffman, appealing to the Hittite vassal treaties, points out that the Credo of Joshua 24:2b–13 is the historical prologue of the covenant whose conclusion the remainder of the chapter describes. In the more than thirty international treaties recovered from Boghazkoy, Alalakh and Ras Shamra the place where the treaty was concluded is never mentioned. Nor do the prologues (with two exceptions which Huffman notes) mention documents of investiture, i.e., which specify the granting of a treaty. The granting of a treaty was not considered one of the gracious acts of a suzerain. For this reason, argues Huffman (p. 108), Sinai, which represents the reception of the Law, is not part of the Credo.

For an introduction to the subject of the relationship of Scripture to the Hittite suzerainty treaties cf. Meredith G. Kline: Treaty of the Great King, Grand Rapids, 1963. It must also be remembered that the complete form of a treaty may not necessarily have been recorded upon one document but upon several, cf. Donald J. Wiseman: The Alalakh Tablets, 1953, nos. 1–3, 126, 456. Exodus 20 itself is largely in the form of covenant
What, however, can be said about von Rad's attempt to separate the Sinai sections from the main body of the narrative? Is there a break in the Kadesh tradition between Exodus 18 and Numbers 10 as Wellhausen maintained? Von Rad holds that there was a cycle of Kadesh narratives (Exodus 17–18; Numbers 10–14) and a Sinai cycle (Exodus 19–24; 32–34).

If one examine Exodus 19 as it stands, without the presupposition that documentary analysis must be engaged in, he will note that it very naturally continues the preceding narrative (cf. especially 17:1). In 19:1 there is a direct reference to the exodus from Egypt and a time reference in connection therewith. Unless we assume then that a redactor has worked over this verse, we must conclude that it constitutes an integral part of the narrative of the Exodus. The mention of Rephidim in 19:2 refers expressly to the previous mention of Rephidim in 17:1, 8 and continues the journey of the Israelites from that point.

In verse two there seems to be obvious reflection upon Exodus three. The word לֶשֶׁת calls to mind the same word in Exodus 3:1, as does also לֶשֶׁת. This word is introduced without any explanation, for the reader is supposedly acquainted with it. In the light of Exodus 3:1 it is perfectly understandable; otherwise it is almost without meaning. If there be no preceding narrative, we are without a word of explanation. What mountain is intended? The same is true of לֶשֶׁת. In the light of Exodus 3 we are prepared for this directly between God and the individual, a form not attested outside the Old Testament. Whereas in the revelation of his will, God did to some extent make use of covenant-forms extant in the world, his revelation was not bound by these forms. To a certain extent these covenant types may be an aid in understanding the form of certain Scriptures, nevertheless, there is danger in pressing this method too far. It still remains true that the best interpreter of Scripture is the Scripture itself. In refuting von Rad's thesis Walter Beyerlin has quite effectively used the covenant pattern (Origins and History of the Oldest Sinaitic Traditions, tr. by S. Rudman, Oxford, Blackwell, 1965).

Huffmon (op. cit., p. 111) suggests that the people may have proceeded to Kadesh and then made a pilgrimage to Sinai. But it is also possible, as Huffmon points out, that there may have been two Meribahs, one near Sinai and one near Kadesh. In his masterful study From Joseph to Joshua, London, 1952, pp. 105 ff., H. H. Rowley maintains that two accounts of what took place after the exodus from Egypt may have been combined.
word, but if Exodus 19 is to be divorced from what precedes we are left without explanation. Likewise, the phrase, *and God called to him from the mountain* brings to mind *and God called to him from the midst of the bush* in Exodus 3:4. A similarity exists also between *thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and thus shalt thou say to the sons of Israel* of Exodus 3:14.

When one examines Numbers 10, he notes that here, too, there is reference to what has preceded. In verse 11 there is a date and an express mention of the cloud being taken up from the tent of testimony. Verse 12 speaks of the wilderness of Sinai, which clearly reflects upon the similar language used in Exodus 19. Unless we engage in drastic excisions we must accept the narrative as it stands, and then it is clear that the break which Wellhausen, von Rad and others thought that they found here is non-existent.

It has been necessary to consider von Rad's assertion that the narratives which recount the events at Mount Sinai are not an original part of the Exodus account, for if he is correct, then it follows that Exodus 3, which narrates the call of Moses, must be abandoned as unworthy of historical consideration. The reason for this is that Exodus 3 is a preparation for the meeting of Moses with God upon the holy mount of Sinai and the revelation of the law. If God did not meet Moses and the law was not revealed, then obviously, the third chapter with its prediction, "ye shall serve God upon this mountain" is not historical fact.

**The Unity of Exodus Three**

It is now necessary to examine more closely the question of the unity of the third chapter of Exodus. Is this chapter a unified whole or does it consist of a compilation of fragments of various documents, pieced together by a redactor? Modern scholarship is almost unanimous in asserting the latter. Perhaps the latest documentary analysis is that given by Georg Fohrer, who partitions the chapter as follows:

*Georg Fohrer: Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus, Berlin, 1964, p. 124. Gressmann (Mose und seine Zeit, Göttingen, 1913, p. 21) holds that the chapter is a compilation of JE: "3:1, Horeb E; 2-4a Sinai, bush, Yahweh J; 5 J // 4b. 6 God E; 7, 8 Yahweh J // 9-12 E; 13-15 God E, but vs. 15 is of later origin" because in E the name of Yahweh is partly
Fohrer candidly acknowledges that the presence of the divine names largely guides him in this analysis, although he recognizes that there may be deviations from this analysis. There are, asserts Fohrer, differences in the various documents. According to J Moses comes to the mountain of Yahweh, according to E to the mountain of God. J says that first Moses approached a burning bush, and God spoke to him, whereas E maintains that God spoke to him immediately. From J we learn that Yahweh himself will bring the Israelites out of Egypt; whereas E holds that Yahweh entrusts this task to Moses. Furthermore the deity declares twice that he has seen the affliction of his people. Likewise there are two occurrences of and he spoke (vv. 5, 6) and and now go (vv. 9a+16, 10). If this minute analysis strikes the unprejudiced reader as somewhat overrefined and possibly lacking in a sense of humor, we can only say that this is what we are asked to accept in place of the narrative as it stands. Refined as such analysis may be, we must nevertheless evaluate it.

According to Fohrer, the words of 3:1, and he came unto the mountain of God, belong to E and not to J. It would seem that a redactor has cut these words out of the E document and inserted them in J (which comprises the earlier part of verse one and continues with verse two), apparently for the purpose of making it appear that Sinai was the mountain of Elohim. That such a procedure is unnatural (great books are not made this way, to say nothing of the question of the avoided. Vv. 16 ff. probably belong to E; Gressmann regards vv. 18–22 as a later element. Carpenter and Harford (The Composition of the Hexateuch, 1902, p. 515) attribute 3:2–4a, 5, 7–9a, 14, 16–18 to J and 3:1, 4b, 6, 9b–13, 15, 19, 21 to E. It should be noted particularly with respect to Gressmann, how determinative a role the divine names play in the documentary analysis.


Bible's inspiration) is evident, but more than that, the true significance of the names is ignored.\footnote{The term is here used by way of anticipation. There is no evidence of any kind from any source to support the position that the mountain was regarded as sacred before Moses' calling. The designation *Horeb* apparently applied not merely to one mountain but to several. \textit{Cf.} Hengstenberg (\textit{Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch}, Vol. II, pp. 325-327) for one of the earliest presentations of this view. In this passage the term 'Horeb' is appropriate in order to connect with what precedes (e. g., 2:25 where the word appears twice) and to show that the true God is the One who appears to Moses. \textit{Cf.} Gustav Hölscher: "Sinai und Choreb" in \textit{Festschrift Rudolf Bultmann}, 1949, pp. 127-132. The question of the significance of these two names we plan to treat in greater detail in connection with the exposition.}

We may note that in 4:27 and 18:5 (English 4:28 and 18:6) there is a similar usage of the word Elohim. In the earlier days of documentary analysis it was simply the presence of the divine name which led to these passages being assigned to what is today known as E. The reason for the usage of Elohim is to show that the mountain belongs to the true God and is thus to be distinguished from other mountains. Psalm 68:17 likewise uses the name (although without the definite article) to distinguish Sinai from ordinary mountains. It is for this reason also that, both in 4:20 and 17:9, the rod is designated the rod of God. This rod is thus set apart from all other rods, as that which belongs to God.

There is a reason for the prominence of Elohim in the early chapters of Exodus, but it is one which modern scholarship largely ignores. Modern scholarship would maintain that the name Yahweh was first made known to the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. In so maintaining, however, it overlooks the deep significance of the name. With the book of Exodus we are entering upon a new epoch in the history of redemption. The patriarchal period is past, and the descendants of the patriarchs are now but a slave people in a foreign land. Will their God help them at this juncture of their history? They have known this God under various designations, Elohim, El Shaddai, and Yahweh, yet they have not known the full significance, nor have they experienced the full significance, of the name Yahweh. They must learn that Elohim, the powerful God of creation and providence is also Yahweh, the redeemer God of the covenant. Hence, the
frequent usage of Elohim in the early chapters of Exodus (cf., e.g., 1:17, 20, 21; 2:23, 25) prepares the way for the revelation of the name Yahweh. At the same time, although Elohim was regarded as the God of creation and providence, he was also the God to whom Israel cried in the time of her deep need. The usage of Elohim, then, is to call attention and to prepare the way for the approaching epoch of revelation and to indicate that before it the present epoch was about to pass away. Israel must learn the lesson that the God to whom she had turned in her times of need is the Yahweh of redemption who is about to enter into covenant with her.

With verse two the transition begins. Here the angel is designated the Angel of the Lord, which may have been somewhat of a stereotyped expression. The word Yahweh in verse 4, however, clearly points to the transition. We are to learn that he whom the people had worshipped and known as Elohim is truly Yahweh, their covenant God. The term Yahweh appears seven times and in verses 2, 4, and 7 the language is that of the writer of the account. The change, however, is not absolute, for the language reverts immediately to Elohim, and in verse four which contains the first usage of Yahweh as a subject, the word Elohim also occurs. This verse is one of the strongest stumblingblocks in the way of a documentary analysis. God is Yahweh, but he is also Elohim, and so we are still in the state of transition. Thus the way is prepared for the identification of God in verses 6 ff. as the God of the patriarchs.

From this point on to the close of the conversation respecting the significance of the covenant name, Elohim is exclusively employed (cf: vv. 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). When Elohim has made it clear that he is Yahweh and will make himself known as Yahweh, the designation Yahweh alone is used until the end of the chapter. In fact, Moses is commanded to make known to the Israelites that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, has appeared unto him (v. 15 and cf. v. 18).

It is apparent, then, that there is a very definite reason for the distribution of the divine names in this chapter. Before the people know that Elohim is Yahweh, Moses himself must have that knowledge, and it is the purpose of this chapter to show that God did convey that information to him. As far as the usage of the divine names is concerned, we must
conclude that there is a genuine unity in the chapter, and as a unity, therefore, we shall proceed to study the content of the chapter. Other arguments advanced to demonstrate a lack of unity or the presence of duplicate accounts we shall consider as we turn to the exposition of the passage. As far as the presence of the divine names is concerned, instead of lending support to the documentary analysis, they are strongly opposed to it, and in one particular instance, namely, verse 4, where both Yahweh and Elohim occur, constitute a serious obstacle to documentary partition.

The Burning Bush

Before attempting an exposition of the passage we must give consideration to the question of the burning bush, for this question brings us face to face with the problem of the nature of Exodus 3. Martin Noth claims that it is a favorite explanation of exegetes that the burning bush is a manifestation similar to St. Elmo's fire, and he thinks that, although we cannot regard this as a certain explanation, we must imagine something of the sort. Such a phenomenon was regarded as something awesome, a sign of the divine presence. There was a local tradition of a holy place with a burning bush and this has now entered into Israelite tradition to provide a concrete background for the account of the first encounter of Moses with God.

With this explanation we are in effect asked to regard the chapter as nothing more than an account of ancient traditions of the Hebrews. Nowhere does Noth make it clear that the true God did appear to Moses, as this chapter records. For our part we are compelled to consider the chapter as

99 Martin Noth: *Exodus*, E. T., Philadelphia, 1962, p. 39. During stormy weather discharges of atmospheric electricity give off a glow from the extremities of pointed objects such as ships' masts. The term St. Elmo is a corruption of St. Erasmus (or Ermo), the patron saint of Mediterranean sailors. Has anyone, however, ever mistaken St. Elmo's fire for a burning bush that burned yet was not consumed? Certainly the learned and wise Moses would not have done so.

30 This statement cannot be supported by any evidence. It fits in well with the prevailing naturalistic account of the origin of Israel's religion and hence is almost cavalierly adopted.
sacred Scripture and so to interpret it. Without at this point endeavoring to give a defense of the position that the Scripture of the Old as well as the New is a special revelation from God, we shall nevertheless proceed upon that assumption and seek to point out the inadequacy inherent in alternate attempts to explain the miracle of the burning bush other than as a genuine miracle.  

Hugo Gressmann has perhaps collected the greatest number of supposedly similar phenomena, and it will be well briefly to consider these. He mentions that some appeal to the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire, as well as to fire brands or reflexes of light, which must often have occurred in dry lands with an abundance of storms. Gressmann, however, thinks that this is a *contradictio in adiecto*, for where there are many storms, he says, there is fruitful land and much rain. Furthermore, he claims that underlying this theory is the false idea that Yahweh was originally a storm deity, whereas only later on the soil of Canaan did he become such. If Sinai were a volcano, one could he thinks, if he were proceeding upon rationalistic grounds, seek to explain the burning bush upon the basis of volcanic phenomena, or of subterranean fire, assuming that the bush stood near escaping gases from under the ground.

Gressmann tells us that there are accounts of burning bushes or holy trees which fell into flames and were not consumed. Thus Achilles Tatius relates concerning Tyre that fire enveloped the branches of a sacred olive tree but the soot of the fire nourished the tree. Thus it is claimed that there exists friendship between fire and tree. Nonnus tells of a burning tree upon a floating rock in the sea, and Georgius Syncellus relates that a tree by the grave of Abraham and Isaac seemed to burn but did not burn. Eustathius speaks of the same phenomenon however in different terms, asserting that when the tree had been lighted it was fully on fire, and when the fire burned out, the tree still stood sound. Gressmann further calls attention to the legend that a pious man once saw the holy walnut tree at Nebk in flames. Believing

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31 In *Thy Word Is Truth*, Grand Rapids, 1957, we have sought to set forth the reasons why we believe the Bible to be the Word of God.
eyes have supposedly seen mysterious fires or lights in trees and pious ears have at the same time heard wondrous music. Gressmann believes that the luster as well as the music belong to the appearance of the holy, and just as the music is not to be explained upon the basis of some naturalistic phenomenon, neither is the light nor the fire.

How are these phenomena to be related to what is given in Exodus? If we assert that they are simply the characteristics of myth and saga then we have relegated the Exodus narrative to the same category as tales of myth and saga. We then have in the third chapter of Exodus an account which is not historically true, but is simply a story which the ancient Hebrews liked to tell. It is a part of their tradition and is probably aetiological in nature, designed to explain why certain things are as they are. Sinai was regarded as a holy mountain, and the saga or myth or call it what one will of the burning bush gives the explanation why this is so. The roots of this story are lost in hoary antiquity. Perhaps there may have been some basis of truth in it; perhaps not. If form criticism tells us that we have here an aetiological saga, then we cannot take the narrative seriously. It is merely an explanation, possibly containing some elements of truth, of the fact that in the day of the writer men regarded Mount Sinai as a holy mountain.

There are those, however, who seek to give a rationalistic explanation of the phenomenon, and Gressmann rightly criticizes them. It is rather difficult to explain a burning bush as the result of volcanic phenomena, for how could this explain the fact that the bush was burning and yet was not consumed? The same is true of subterranean fire. How does anyone know that the bush was close to seeping gases? Furthermore, both of these explanations leave too much unexplained. Moses knew the country intimately, and had Sinai been a volcano or had there been a place where subterranean gases issued forth, he would have known it well, and probably often would have seen the appearances of such volcanic action or subterranean fire. Even assuming that he did not know the country, an assumption that no one who knows the desert would entertain for an instant,13 when he

13 The present writer had the privilege of travelling in the Sinai peninsula
approached the bush he would have seen that there was nothing at all out of the ordinary. He would have realized that there was nothing more than volcanic action or seeping gases and he would have known the reason why the bush appeared to burn without being consumed. Furthermore, the discovery of the actual truth of the situation would have destroyed any psychological condition in which he might have thought that he heard a voice speaking to him. The naturalistic interpretations do not explain; they create more difficulties than they remove. As the exposition proceeds we shall seek to point out in greater detail what some of these difficulties are.

It remains to insist that the account of the burning bush is *sui generis*. The alleged parallels which Gressmann has adduced in his attempt to show that Exodus 3 belongs to a certain type of literature are really not parallels at all. For that matter there is no parallel to the account of the burning bush. We have but to examine the first of Gressmann's alleged parallels, the account found in the *Erotica*.

To be noted in the first place is the fact that the olive tree is found on sacred ground, *i.e.*, ground which was commonly recognized as sacred. This was not the case with the burning bush. Moses did not know that the place was sacred and had no hesitation in approaching. Indeed, the reason why he approached was idle curiosity; he merely wanted to know what

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34 Some of the naturalistic explanations are that a flake of gypsum blown against a twig may have set a bush alight. It is said that once a year the sunlight penetrates through a chink in the rocks on the summit of Jebel ed-Deir and falls upon a spot at the foot of Jebel Musa. Hence, it is hinted that this might in some way be connected with the vision perceived by Moses. *Cf.* the interesting discussion in Joan Meredyth Chichele Plowden: *Once In Sinai*, London, 1940, pp. 48, 147–150.

35 *Op. cit.*, p. 26, τὸ δὲ Ἀποικία λεπόρον. Thus the place is introduced as already sacred. It was merely a shrine; the ground mentioned in Exodus 3 only becomes sacred because God has appeared there. Once the theophany was concluded the place would no longer be sacred.
was happening. Only as he drew near did God tell him of the nature of the place. Furthermore, the leaves of the tree were known to be bright or sparkling; nothing similar is related in Exodus.\(^{36}\) Fire was planted with the tree and catches the branches with a mighty flame and the soot of the fire nourishes the tree. Thus, fire and tree are said to be friends.\(^{37}\)

A mere reading of this account will reveal the profound differences that exist between it and the narrative in Exodus. In Tatius' account the fire is said to be planted, for the purpose is to show that there is a friendship between what is planted and the fire. The precise sense of soot (αἴθαλη) is not as clear as might be desired but apparently the thought is that the fire somehow gives nourishment to the tree. What strikes one immediately is that in this narrative there is nothing approaching the seriousness of the Exodus account. The burning bush is not a wonder known far and wide, but an event which Moses alone was permitted to behold. Furthermore, it was filled with deep significance, for it revealed that the Holy God was present in the midst of his people and it prepared the way for the revelation of the covenant name of God. The wonder was not to show the friendship between fire and something planted, but to induce in the heart of Moses the proper reverence so that in humility he would be willing to go forth as a messenger of the Holy God who had appeared unto him.\(^{38}\)


\(^{37}\) Note the passive πεφύτβυται, τὸ φυτόν. The meaning of the episode is αὕτη πιερὸς φιλία καὶ φυτόν.  

\(^{38}\) In the interpretation of Nonnus (see Gressmann, op. cit., p. 26 for references) we are really dealing with an event of magic. Two rocks swim (πλώουσιν) in the sea (ἐν ἀλὶ) on which a pair of self-planted olive trees of the same age grow. From the burning tree (ἀπὸ φλογεροῦ δὲ δένδρου) sparks shoot forth, and enflame the unburned (ἀφλεγός) olive tree.

Another alleged parallel has to do with a “wonderful terebinth” (ᵗʰὺν θαυμασιάν τερέβινθον) that grew where Jacob supposedly buried the gods which he had brought. Offerings were brought to an altar by the trunk of the tree, which seemed to be destroyed but was not burned up (ἡ δ' οὐ κατεκαλεῖτο δοκοῦσα).

Eustathius speaks of the same matter, stating that after the terebinth
This brings us to the heart of the problem. If we at all take the Bible seriously we are compelled to assert that there must have been some compelling reason which caused Moses to return to Egypt and to deliver the nation. All subsequent history is based upon the assumption that Moses did in fact bring forth the people from Egyptian bondage. Whence arose the conviction in Moses’ heart that he was thus to deliver the people? The Bible gives a clear answer to that question; the Bible declares that God appeared to Moses and charged him with the task of deliverance.

The burning bush was a miracle performed by God himself. It introduced that great period of miracles in Biblical history when God must show his saving power to Pharaoh and perform signs and wonders upon him. Israel must know that the God whom Moses proclaims to them is the God whom their fathers worshipped, the God who is in sovereign control over all the elements of nature. Such a God they may follow and such a God they may worship. In the miracle of the burning bush then, we see no low display of magical power, but rather a manifestation of the holiness of him who was in truth the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

(to be concluded)

was set on fire (ὕφασκέισα, lighted from beneath, by whom?) it becomes completely fire (ἐλφὲ γινεται). When the fire is out (κατασβεσθείσα) it is seen to be unharmed. How completely different from the miracle recorded in Exodus!
THE CALL OF MOSES
Part II
EDWARD J. YOUNG

IF THE burning bush is to be understood as a genuine miracle, it is well to ask what its significance is. The miracles of the Bible were designed to be signs and attestations of God's plan of redemption. In what sense, then, did the burning bush point to God's redemptive activity?

According to Acts 7:30 the events described in Exodus 3 took place forty years after Moses' flight into the land of Midian. Emphasis falls immediately upon Moses and the fact that he was shepherding (the participle expresses continual occupation) the flock of Jethro. In the desert itself there was apparently not enough vegetation for the flock, so Moses led the flock beyond the desert. This would imply that when he had come to Horeb, he was no longer in the desert. Indeed, if we are to identify the mountain with Jebel el-Musa or Jebel es-Sufsafeh we can well understand why the plain Er-rahah would have been sought after by a shepherd. Even today there is considerable water in this location.¹

To assume that the mountain was regarded as a sanctuary even before the revelation to Moses is unwarranted.² The designation, "mountain of God", is merely used by anticipa-


² Josephus, Antiquities, 2:12:1, strangely remarks, τούτο (i.e., Mt. Sinai) δ' ἐστὶν ἔσφηλτατο τῶν ταύτης ὅρων καὶ πρὸς νομᾶς ἄρσων, ἀγαθής φυσικής πόσα καὶ διὰ τὸ δόξαν ἔχειν ἐνδιατρίβειν αὐτῷ τὸν θεόν ὦ κατανεμηθέντα πρότερον, ὦ τολμώντων ἐμβατέμεν εἰς αὐτὸ τῶν ποιμένων.
tion, and there is no reason for supposing that Moses was expecting a revelation or that he came to seek such. The whole emphasis of verse one falls upon the ordinary, earthly task of Moses. He was a shepherd and he was concerned for the welfare of his sheep. Inasmuch as there was water near Horeb, that is where he brought his flock. The Rabbis may not have been wrong when they declared that God first tested Moses in small things so that he might later be suited to serve in greater tasks. He who could faithfully be a shepherd in Midian could serve in the exalted position which God was preparing for him in the divine economy.

Why, however, is the mountain here named Horeb and not Sinai? The most likely answer is that Horeb and Sinai are simply two different names of the same mountain, just as Hermon and Sirion both designate Mt. Hermon (cf. Deuteronomy 3:9; Psalm 29:6). Why this was so we do not know, nor do we know why Horeb is sometimes used and sometimes Sinai. Conceivably one might fit into the rhythm of a verse better than the other. That the difference is due to euphonic reasons, however, is merely conjecture. Certainly it is not due to the predilections of supposed authors of documents. Nor can the presence of these words serve as evidence of difference in document.

Exodus 3:1 is generally attributed to J, but inasmuch as its final clause contains the word Horeb, the "critics" would excise this clause and attribute it to E. Thus, 3:1 is a composite, 3:1a, b belonging to J and 3:1b to E. The last clause is essential, however, to the narrative for it gives the locale

3 George A. Barton: Semitic and Hamitic Origins, Philadelphia, 1934, pp. 334, 335 holds that Moses was psychologically prepared for a message from the god of the volcano.

4 Dillmann: Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, Leipzig, 1880, p. 24, quotes Burckhardt to the effect that with the approach of summer the Bedouin of the peninsula leave the lower regions and move to the higher districts where the pasture remains fresh for a longer time.


6 Acts 7:30 speaks of ἐν τῇ ἔρημῳ τοῦ ὄρους Σινᾶ. Inasmuch as Sinai appears six times in Exodus 19 (generally attributed to E), Horeb can hardly be regarded as a characteristic of E.
where the revelation is to occur and it also points out the destination that Moses had in mind in leading his flock beyond the wilderness.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD IN THE BUSH

Having given the locale for the revelation, the narrator now relates the fact of the revelation itself. This is mentioned before there is any hint of a burning bush, for what is essential for an understanding of all that follows is the fact that God has been seen by Moses. The One who appears to Moses is the “angel of the Lord”. According to Jewish tradition this figure is to be distinguished from God Himself, for he is merely God's messenger and speaks in God’s Name. The thought and will behind the words are God’s, but the actual words and deeds are said to be those of the messenger himself.

As the text stands, however, it clearly identifies the Angel with God. The Angel appeared unto Moses in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush, and God called to Moses from the midst of the bush. Furthermore, the manner in which the LORD is introduced as one who sees that Moses had turned aside suggests that the LORD and the Angel are one. How is this to be explained?

Martin Noth apparently looks with favor upon the explanation given by Von Rad, who declares that the Angel is God in human form, a form in which Yahweh appears. This result, however, has been achieved by means of intensive inner revising of very old traditions. These traditions told about unique and spectacular divine appearances at definite shrines and sites. Later on men came to assume that it was an Angel of Yahweh that thus appeared, and in this way they broke down the naive immediate intimacy of God's relationship. They introduced this mediating figure, the Angel of the Lord, and yet at the same time preserved the directness of God's address to man and of His saving activity. Von Rad acknowledges that there are Christological “qualities” in this figure and that it is a type or “shadow” of Jesus Christ.

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7 E. g., Soneino, p. 213.
8 Martin Noth: Exodus, Philadelphia, 1962. Von Rad writes (Das erste
Is the "Angel", however, to be accounted for as the product of theological reflection? What would have led men to introduce this mediating figure into old traditions which spoke of an immediate appearance of God? And what evidence is there for such an assumption? Is there really extant evidence to support the idea that we have here the product of revision of ancient traditions? And if the introduction of the Angel into the picture is merely the result of theological reflection, how, possibly, can the Angel be a type of Jesus Christ? If the Angel actually did appear to Moses, as Scripture says he did, then He can be a type of Christ; but if He is merely a shadowy figure, the product of the human imagination, how can he typify the Mediator par excellence?

In the exegetical sphere Von Rad is correct as far as his interpretation of the text is concerned, but he enters the realm of fancy when he speaks of revising ancient traditions. The Angel is a real Being, and He is to be identified with God. Inasmuch as He is sent from the Lord, He is not God the Father Himself but distinct from the Father. If we would do justice to the Scriptural data, we must insist therefore both upon the distinguishableness of the Angel from the Father and also upon the identity of essence with the Father. Christian theologians have rightly seen in this strange Figure a prein-

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carnate appearance of the One who in the days of His flesh could say, “And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness of me” (John 5:37). This One is indeed a messenger to bring to Moses the announcement of deliverance to come.

Calvin may be mentioned as representative of a common interpretation of the significance of the miracle. In the bush, he holds, we see the humble and despised people surrounded by the flames of oppression; yet in the midst is God who prevents the flames from devouring the nation. Keil appeals to Judges 9:15 to support the position that in contrast to the more noble and lofty trees the thornbush aptly represents the people of God in their humiliation. On this particular point there seems to be fairly widespread agreement among interpreters.

Is it, however, correct to say that the fire stands for oppression? According to Keil, appealing to 1 Corinthians 3:11 ff., the fire, considered as burning and consuming, figuratively represents refining affliction and destroying punishment. It must be noted, however, that the Angel of the Lord is said to have appeared in a flame of fire. The fire, therefore, it would seem, is not the iron furnace of Egypt (Deuteronomy 4:20), but is rather to be understood as a symbol of the burning zeal of God. Inasmuch as this fire burns the bush, it signifies the pure holiness of God which comes in judgment and devours whatever is impure. Nevertheless, the fire, although it burns, does not consume. The sin of the people could call

10 Calvin: “... the ancient teachers of the Church have rightly understood that the Eternal Son of God is so called in respect to his office as Mediator, which he figuratively bore from the beginning, although he really took it upon him only at his Incarnation”. Harmony of the Four Last Books of the Pentateuch, Grand Rapids, 1950, Vol. I, p. 61.
11 Keil and Delitzsch: Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, 1949, Vol. I, p. 438. It must be noted, however, that the word ἐσχατος is used, not ἐσχάτος.
forth the punitive wrath of God; but the fire does not con­sume, for God has promised salvation to this very despised and lowly slave people. In the midst of the Israelites, the despised slaves of Egypt, dwells the holy LORD himself, whose zeal would consume whatever is not pure yet who does not devour, for His intentions are of grace toward His chosen people. Thus, as so often in the Old Testament, judgment and salvation are linked together and go hand in hand.

That the Lord dwells in the midst of His people is a thought which finds emphasis in the twice-mentioned phrase, "from the midst of the bush". It is this thought which prepares the way for the revelation of God as the God of the fathers. He who had appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was at this very moment, despite the lowly condition of the people, in their midst. Nor had He ever deserted them. God had taken up His abode in their midst and would never abandon them. Even when He must bring judgment, He is in their midst. They cannot find Him by turning to the gods of Egypt, but must look for His presence among themselves. Thus, the miracle of the burning bush, among other things, both strengthens Moses' faith in the presence of God with His people and prepares him to understand that this God, who is now in their midst, is the same God who spoke to the fathers.

**The Response of Moses**

To this wondrous sight of the burning bush Moses responds. The words, "And Moses said", in verse three do not suggest that Moses spoke the following words aloud, but merely indicate that they were the thoughts which passed through his mind. Moses recognizes that what he sees is a "great sight", and hence something out of the ordinary. Had it been merely the glistening of the berries of a bush in the sun or the campfire of the shepherds, or anything of similar nature, Moses could hardly have considered it a "a great sight". It is noteworthy also that the only reason for Moses' turning aside is that he

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**Schmalenbach: op. cit., p. 374, "Das Gesicht von dem brennenden und doch nicht verbrennenden Busche (2 Mos. 3, 1–8) stellt die grosse Wahrheit der Unzerstörbarkeit der Gnade Gottes gegen seine Gemeine inmitten aller Trübsal dar".**
is moved by curiosity. He sees something unusual, which he
designates a "great sight", and he does not know what it is.
He turns aside from his regular course simply to discover the
explanation of the unusual phenomenon, the like of which he
has never before seen at the base of the mountain.

It is this fact of Moses' curiosity which rules out once and
for all the idea that Moses, because of long meditation upon
the suffering of his people in Egypt, is in a frame of mind or
attitude in which he could readily believe that a voice was
speaking to him. The late George A. Barton, for example,
maintained that as Moses was alone with the flock in the
desert he spent the time brooding upon the "acute problems
of life as he had experienced it". Among these thoughts were
considerations of the nature of the "desert god" that his
father-in-law, Jethro, served. The mountain was volcanic, and
its smoke and flames expressed the wrath of the desert god,
Yahweh, whose presence was indicated by the smoke of the
volcano. The Kenites, who worshipped Yahweh, were vic­
torious in war, for they could make metal weapons, whereas
their enemies had weapons of flint, arrows and stones. As
Moses drew near the mountain to obtain a better view of the
strange sight of a bush on fire, he seemed to hear a voice.
"This was a religious experience as genuinely real as that
which any prophet ever had, and its main elements shine out
still through the phraseology of later tradition. That phrase­
ology assumes the results of historical processes which we now
know to have been later, but the religious emotional brooding
over the problems of himself and his people, and the sudden
conviction that this powerful god of the desert, in whose
territory he had himself found asylum, had sent him to rescue
his people, bears all the marks of psychological reality, and
alone accounts for the subsequent career of Moses".

What took place, according to Barton, was the psycho­
logical experience known as an "audition". "In all parts of

17 Inasmuch as the Sinai peninsula is not volcanic, advocates of the
theory that the theophany was related to volcanic action usually seek to
locate the mountain in Midian, east of the peninsula.
18 Op. cit., p. 335. I have discussed the Kenite Hypothesis in "The God
the world and in all religions men of a certain type of psychic constitution, after seeking for the solution of a religious problem and brooding long over it, have found their problem solved in a flash of insight so sudden and clear that they have seemed to hear a voice uttering the words in which their thought took shape".18

One may well ask as he ponders Barton's explanation how it is possible to know what type of psychic constitution Moses possessed and what he was thinking as he tended his sheep in the desert. If we are to judge from some of the incidents recorded in the Pentateuch, Moses was a man of decisive action.19 What his particular "psychic" constitution was we simply do not know. Nor do we know what problems occupied his thoughts as he wandered alone in the desert.

Furthermore, there is not the slightest evidence that the mountain of God was a volcano. If, however, it had been a volcano, Moses would have been so familiar with flames shooting forth from it that he would not have supposed that one such flame was a bush burning yet not consumed. How conceivably could a shooting flame seem like a bush on fire? Possibly one who did not know the desert might come to such a conclusion, although it is a situation difficult to understand; but when a man had spent forty years in the desert, it is asking too much of one's credulity to expect him to believe that such a man might mistake a shooting flame of fire for a burning bush.20

It must further be noted that, even if Moses had been pondering the sufferings of his people and even if he were in a psychological frame of mind to receive a revelation or an audition, that frame of mind would completely have been shattered when he discovered that, after all, there was nothing unusual with respect to the bush. Indeed, the very sight of the bush which seemed to be burning without being consumed might itself well have destroyed such a psychological frame or condition of mind. Instead, Moses' mind would have become filled with curiosity as to the explanation of the strange

19 Cf., e. g., Exodus 2:11 ff.
phenomenon before him. In place of being deeply moved by thoughts of the condition of the Israelites, his mind would have become filled with thoughts as to why the bush was burning and yet did not burn up. And, indeed, if we allow the Scripture any credence at all, it was precisely such thoughts which did occupy his mind. "I shall now turn aside, that I may see this great sight, why the bush does not burn". Curiosity filled Moses' mind, not thoughts of his people's need. It was not exactly the frame of mind suitable for the reception of an "audition".

More important and significant than any of the considerations hitherto adduced is the fact that, if Dr. Barton's explanation of the events at the burning bush is correct, not only the work of Moses but the entire subsequent history of Israel are founded, not upon a genuine revelation from God, but upon Moses' mistaken conviction, that God had appeared to him and charged him to deliver the people from Egypt. If God actually did appear to Moses, as Exodus relates, that is one thing. The entire subsequent history of Israel is then filled with meaning and is capable of explanation. If, on the other hand, it is simply founded upon Moses' conviction that God appeared to him and upon nothing more than that, the picture is entirely different. It is one thing to say, to take another example, that the Christian Church is founded upon the belief of the apostles that Jesus Christ rose from the dead; it is something entirely different to assert that the Christian Church is founded upon the fact that Jesus Christ actually did rise from the dead.

This is the crux of the issue. No matter how compelling the conviction of Moses may have been, if it were not based upon fact, the subsequent events would remain without adequate explanation. If the foundation of all that follows is simply the conviction of Moses, then the history of Israel is founded upon man and upon man alone. Very different, however, is the case if God did appear to Moses and the burning bush was a miracle. Then, and then alone, we may say that the subsequent history of the nation of Israel is based upon a revelation of God. It is then the work of God and not of man.

There remains, however, another objection which men raise against accepting the text of Exodus as it stands. We are
told by recent writers that the ancient Israelites would not have asked whether the burning bush was miraculous or merely an unusual natural phenomenon. They had no basis, we are told, for making a distinction between what was wonderful and yet ordinary and what, on the other hand, was miraculous.\textsuperscript{21} All of God's works were wonderful, and the modern distinction between the miraculous and the non-miraculous was one which they did not make. This is so, we are told, even if the burning bush actually was a miracle.

In answer to this contention we need not stress the distinctive vocabulary which has to do with signs and wonders and distinctive events. The Hebrew words do indeed point to certain events which were performed by God's power in the external world, which in their appearance\textsuperscript{22} were contrary to God's ordinary and even unusual providential working, and which were clearly designed as signs and attestations of the plan of redemption. The signs and wonders, for example, which God performed upon Pharaoh were miraculous events, and could easily have been distinguished from even extraordinary events of providence.

With respect to the burning bush, we must insist that the objection which we are now engaged in considering does not hold. At first, it is true, the bush probably appeared to Moses as a wonderful event of providence. Were that not so, he would not have turned aside to examine it. Even from the distance where he was he could discern that the bush was burning yet did not burn up, and to discover the reason for this was the cause of his turning aside. At the least, he would have considered this a wonderful event of providence.

When the revelation was given to him, however, Moses would have realized that the Lord was performing in the burning bush a sign or wonder which was unique. Were he

\textsuperscript{21} This idea has recently appeared in the attractive study of James Plastaras: \textit{The God of Exodus}, Milwaukee, 1966, pp. 65, 66.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{i.e.}, as they appeared to man. What Moses saw as he beheld the burning bush, for example, was a phenomenon which appeared to be contrary to the other phenomena with which he had experience. In the light of the definition of miracle which we have just given in the body of the text, the reader will find it very profitable to make a careful study of the usage of such words as \textit{טּוֹלַדְתָּא}, \textit{תָּנ֣וֹא} and \textit{תּוֹפַע}.\textsuperscript{81}
to ponder the nature of the event, he would have been compelled to conclude that God, the all powerful one, was causing the bush to burn and yet not permitting it to be consumed. And he would well have understood that this event was designed by God to be an attestation of His plan of salvation. For the Lord explicitly stated to Moses that He had remembered His people and the covenant made with the fathers and had come down to deliver them. Moses, therefore, irrespective of the terminology he might have employed, would have placed this event in an entirely different category from a manifestation of St. Elmo's fire or anything of similar import. A miracle is not merely an event that appears to be contrary to what one ordinarily meets in life, but it is also an act which Almighty God performs to attest His plan of redemption. It behooves us to be cautious about asserting that the Israelites would not have distinguished between the miraculous and the merely wonderful.

Not only does the miracle attest the present working of God but it also points to the continuity of His working in His determination to accomplish redemption. The revelation which accompanies the miracle first looks back to the promises made to the patriarchs, “I am the God of thy father” (Exodus 3:6a), and it also points to the future, “And I came down to deliver it from the hand of Egypt” (Exodus 3:8a). This particular miracle, therefore, was for the benefit of Moses primarily, that through it he might become convinced that the God who had spoken to his ancestors was in the midst of His people and would be faithful to His promise to redeem them.

**The God of Thy Father**

In this narrative emphasis falls upon the initiative of God. Moses is not seeking a revelation, nor does he have any intention of drawing near to a “holy place” in the hope of meeting God. He is simply engaged in his ordinary daily business when God approaches him. This factor also is characteristic in the performance of a miracle. God comes to man to convince man that He is man's Redeemer. Hence, the address, “Moses, Moses”. Perhaps there is some merit in the old
Jewish interpretation to the effect that the repetition of the name was for the sake of encouraging Moses and indicating affection toward him. Both Abraham and Jacob had been similarly addressed (cf. Genesis 22:11 and 46:2). Some writers assume without argument that Moses came to a holy place. Thus, Noth remarks, “It is therefore probable that here too we are dealing with an original local tradition to which the ‘holy ground’ concerned was still known as such at a later period” (p. 39). Plastaras at least seeks to give some evidence for adopting this view. He appeals to the definiteness of the word “mountain” in the phrase “mountain of God” (verse one) and to the use of the technical word “holy place” (i.e., mà-qôm) in verse five. This evidence, he thinks, suggests that the place was already a sanctuary, although Moses himself may not have been aware of that fact. With respect to the definiteness of the word “mountain” we would simply remark that the word is used to express the point of view of Moses, the writer of the Pentateuch. At the time when this passage was written down, the events herein described had already occurred. What would be more natural than to speak of the mountain where God had appeared to His people as “the mountain of God”? To say the least it is questionable whether the word mà-qôm is here employed in a technical sense. What other suitable word for “place” appears in biblical Hebrew? Whether it is used technically or in a specialized sense in a given context, only that context can decide. In the present passage there is nothing to indicate a specialized usage. Rather, the addition of the words “whereon thou standest” would seem to suggest that the reference is merely to a particular spot. If the word “mà-qôm” in itself denotes a sacred place, is it not redundant to say, “the sacred place whereon thou standest is holy ground”? Would it not have been sufficient merely to tell Moses that he was standing upon a mà-qôm? The mere men-

26 We have given evidence for holding that Moses was the writer of the Pentateuch in Introduction to the Old Testament, Grand Rapids, 1954, pp. 47–51.
tion of the word itself should in that case have been sufficient to have informed Moses that the place was sacred.

The view that the term mā-qōm is here technically employed is based upon a particular understanding of the nature of the narrative, namely, that it is an aetiological saga. Originally, argues Plastaras, the narrative was intended for those who went to worship God at a particular sanctuary. But what evidence is there that such was the case? Rather than being a narrative intended for those who went to worship God at a particular sanctuary, the account as we have it in Exodus before the hand of the “critic” has mutilated it relates an event which happened once for all and which had reference to Moses alone. Its whole purpose was to reveal to Moses the fact that the God of his father had not forsaken His people, but dwelt in their midst, and that He would deliver them from the affliction in which they found themselves. This is the profound “theological” significance of the narrative.

There is not a word to indicate that this narrative seeks to explain why a particular spot was regarded as holy by the Israelites. Indeed, there is no evidence that they later did come to regard it as a sanctuary. They did not endeavor to preserve the sanctity of the spot by means of a shrine. They knew that God had appeared unto them upon the mountain, and they regarded the mountain as the mountain of God; but there is no warrant for saying that they considered the place where God appeared to Moses sacred. It is the presence


28 James Barr: *Old and New in Interpretation*, New York, 1966, p. 203 complains of fundamentalism that it has produced no really interesting discussion of biblical interpretation. Two questions arise. First of all, one may well wonder just how much “fundamentalist” exegetical literature Barr has read. All who believe in the infallibility of Scripture as a special revelation of God belong in one camp as over against those who espouse the principles of destructive criticism. Are the studies of Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Kuyper, Warfield, Machen, Murray, to name but a few, uninteresting? Secondly, who is to decide what is interesting and what is not? To the present writer, the revelation at the burning bush is not merely interesting but profoundly rich in saving significance, whereas some of the modern “scholarly” discussions are dry and wearisome. Once one departs from the view that the Bible is a revelation from God, his “theological” interpretations in the deep sense cannot be very exciting, for they are not true.
of God which renders the place holy, and the putting off of
the shoes is intended as a recognition of that fact. Removing
the sandals is a sign of reverence to God, whose presence
sanctifies the place of His appearance to Moses.

According to modern negative criticism, verse 5 is attrib­
uted to J and verse 6 to E. Yet how needless such a partition
is! Verse 5 follows naturally from verse 4b. Moses has re­
sponded to God's call, and now God warns him of the sacred­
ness of the place, thus preparing him for the revelation of the
identity of the One who speaks from the bush. Very striking
and remarkable is the identification that God gives, "I am
the god of thy father". It is the singular which stands out as
unalual. Generally, this is interpreted in a collective sense,
as referring to the patriarchs as a group. The Kittel Bible,
with its customary disregard of the significance of Masoretic
Hebrew, simply proposes an emendation to the plural.29
With such an expedient we cannot rest satisfied since it is
too facile a solution of the difficulty. One possible explana­
tion of the singular is that it was deliberately employed to call
attention to the fact that God was the God of the patriarchs.

In patriarchal times this type of expression was employed
fairly frequently. It was used, for example, in Genesis 31:5,
29, 42, 53, where we find such phrases as "the god of my
father", "the god of your father", and "the god of their
father". Cf. also Genesis 43:23; 50:17; 46:3.30 Recently
Professor Haran has called attention to this expression.
According to him it indicates the household god.31 We can
agree to the extent that there was something very intimate
about the phrase; it pointed to the god whom one's father
worshipped, and it would seem that this was a patriarchal
mode of designating God. When, therefore, the Lord made
known to Moses that He was the God of Moses' father, He

29 I. e., רטועת.
30 I have discussed the significance of these phrases in "The God of the
Fathers", The Westminster Theological Journal, Vol. III, No. 1, 1940,
pp. 25-40. This article seeks to evaluate the views of the late Albrecht
Alt concerning patriarchal religion.
31 Menahem Haran: "The Religion of the Patriarchs: An Attempt at a
Synthesis", Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute, Vol. IV, Leiden,
1965, pp. 30-55.
immediately directed Moses' thought to the time of the ancestors. To rule out all question of doubt the Lord immediately adds, "the god of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the god of Jacob". Thus Moses was reminded of the promises made to the patriarchs individually. The God of the patriarchs was alive in the midst of His people, mindful of His promises and ready to bring deliverance.

In the history of redemption a pivotal point has been reached. The God of patriarchal promises is a God who has the power to deliver His people from bondage. He has control over all of His creation, and this fact He manifests by His appearance in the burning bush. He is a God who can perform wonders, a God of the miraculous.

It would seem that God had appeared in some visible way to Moses, for Moses responds to the revelation by hiding his face, probably wrapping it in his mantle, as Elijah had done (1 Kings 19:13), for he fears to look upon God. In this action, Moses gives expression to his own unworthiness and sinfulness, for he realizes that he is in the presence of the holy God of his people. To look upon his God irreverently would result in death. He is convinced that the one who speaks from the bush had earlier made Himself known to the patriarchs. What, however, about the people who are now in bondage in Egypt?

The Name of God

The narrative in Exodus is smooth and straightforward. God charges Moses to deliver the people; Moses complains of his unworthiness and receives the assurance that God will be with him. Yet, when Moses tells the people that the patriarchal God has appeared unto him and they ask His name, what shall he say unto them? As is well understood today, to the Semite the name had far deeper significance than is the case in our occidental world. With us the name is little more than a vocable; to the Semite, however, it either signified the character of a person or brought to mind something distinctive about him.\textsuperscript{32} To ask for the name of God was to desire to know the nature of God.

\textsuperscript{32} Thus, Moses himself received his name because he was drawn out of
When therefore the Israelites in Egypt should ask as to the name of the patriarchal God, they would want to know concerning His nature. A mere vocable would have been no sufficient answer. Was the God who made promises to the patriarchs still with His people and was he able to deliver them from their present bondage and to bring to fulfillment the ancient promises? We must keep these considerations in mind when we seek to ascertain the meaning of the name revealed to Moses.

Two basic questions call for consideration. In the first place there is the question of the philological significance of the word which we so often transliterate Yahweh. Were we able to ascertain this precise philological significance, it would doubtless be a great boon. That, however, is a goal which apparently has not yet been attained. Nor is it really essential for an understanding of the employment of the word in this context. We must then be guided primarily by usage, in particular by the appearance of the word in this context. In the second place we must seek to ascertain the theological significance of the Name. Why did God reveal this particular Name to Moses at just this time? How does this revelation fit into the plan of redemption?

There are of course a number of views to consider, and we shall briefly mention some of them before proceeding to a discussion of the matter. According to J. Stellingwerff, the late Professor B. Holwerda took the name as signifying "I am, the water ינותן. In this particular instance the significance may simply appear in the assonance, there being no attempt made at etymology. The word may be Egyptian, but it may also be, as Kitchen suggests (The New Bible Dictionary, London, 1962, p. 843), that the word represents an assimilated Semitic word to the Egyptian.

I the God who appears in action". Rashi interpreted, “I will be what I will be”, i.e., more and more God’s unchanging mercy and faithfulness will manifest themselves to His people. Again, emphasis has fallen upon the thought expressed in Exodus 3:12, “Surely I shall be with thee”, and the Name has been taken to indicate that God will be present with His people. It has also been held that the phrase expresses God’s inscrutability. “I am what I am”. Hence, it is concluded that God’s being is inscrutable and man cannot penetrate it. Geerhardus Vos calls attention to what he calls the ontological view, which would render, “I, who am, (truly) am”, thus expressing the fact that God is pure being.

In his interesting discussion of the theology of Exodus, James Plastaras gives some consideration to the meaning of the Name. He feels that the translation I AM is likely to be misleading inasmuch as there is no copula verb in Hebrew. Hence, he maintains that the verb הָיָה was used in the sense of being or becoming in an active or dynamic sense. The word 'הָיָה he would therefore translate “I am present and ready to act”. This presence was an act of grace and not simply the immanent omnipresence of God. The Name designates God as present in power. Plastaras renders it, “I will be present (in a dynamic, active sense) wherever, whenever, and to whomever I will be present”.

In similar vein Martin Noth asserts that the verb קָיָם does not denote pure being but an “active being” and in this instance an “active being” which makes its appearance in the history of Israel. At this point a word of caution is in order. We must remember that “activism” plays a great role in much of modern theology and philosophy. Karl Barth has given great impetus to this conception by identifying God’s

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34 J. Stellingwerff: Oorsprong en toekomst van de creatieve mens, Amsterdam, 1966, p. 122. Holwerda’s words are “Ik ben, ik de handelend optredende God”. The reference is from Dictaten, 1, Aflevering 2, Kampen, 1961, a work which I have not been able to obtain.
36 Vos, op. cit., pp. 132–134, gives a survey of some significant views.
being with his act. "God is who he is", says Barth, "in his act of revelation".\textsuperscript{40} This idea that God is to be identified with his act is very prevalent today.

Yet this activistic emphasis is certainly not biblical. The modern depreciation of metaphysics is not based upon Divine revelation. We cannot therefore be satisfied with the designation "active being" in distinction from "pure being". The God of whom Exodus speaks is not the god of modern theology with its Kantian foundation, but the ever living and true, Triune God of Holy Scripture.

Anyone who studies the revelation given to Moses must realize the difficulty involved in seeking to set forth the precise significance of the Name. At the same time there are certain indications in the Scriptures themselves which will help us arrive at an understanding. The ancient versions which rendered \textit{I am who I am} have hit upon something significant in the revelation, namely, the fact that the Name does serve to express God's aseity.\textsuperscript{41}

With this conviction in mind we may again look at Exodus. If we take the text seriously we are compelled to recognize that the One to whom Moses speaks is a Being distinct from Moses. He is designated with the definite article, \textit{The God}. He is, in other words, the true God, the only God, the God who exists. To this God Moses speaks. Emphasis is placed upon metaphysics. The God with whom Moses converses exists. He is. And what Moses would know is the Name of this God with whom he is speaking.

Verse thirteen prepares for the later revelation of chapter six, verse three, where God says to Moses that by His Name Yahweh He was not known to the patriarchs. What He means

\textsuperscript{40} Karl Barth: \textit{Kirchliche Dogmatik}, II:1, p. 293. "Darum muss das unsere erste und entscheidende Umschreibung des Satzes «Gott ist: sein: «Gott ist, der er ist, in der Tat seiner Offenbarung». And again: "Aber eben das Sein Gottes umschreiben wir, indem wir es als Gottes Wirklichkeit bezeichnen, als Gottes Sein in der Tat, nämlich in der Tat seiner Offenbarung, in welcher das Sein Gottes seine Realität bezeugt: nicht nur seine Realität für uns — das freilich auch! — sondern zugleich und eben so seine eigene, innere, eigentliche Realität, hinter der und über der es keine andere gibt". How different this is from the biblical doctrine of God!

\textsuperscript{41} Thus, the Vulgate, \textit{Dixit Deus ad Moysen: EGO SUM QUI SUM. Ait: Sic dices filiis Israel: QUI EST, misit me ad vos.}
was that in the character of *yhw* He was not known to the fathers. Clearly the verse does not mean that the patriarchs had not heard the vocable *YHWH*. As Professor Kitchen rightly says, “This major prop of the documentary theorists is now definitely swept away, no matter how unwilling they may be to recognize the fact”. The purpose of the revelation now given is to make known the significance of the Name *YHWH*.

With these thoughts in mind we may look again at the third chapter of Exodus. In itself the phrase 'ēh-yeh 'ēser 'ēh-yeh may be translated, “I shall be who I shall be”, as Aquila and Theodotion do render it. From other considerations, however, it would seem that in this context the future is not intended, but rather the present. This is also the force of the word 'ēh-yeh taken alone.

In itself the verb hā-yāh may express pure existence. When it is followed by the preposition Lamed, it is best rendered into English, *become*. This distinction, it would seem, is rather consistently followed. Thus, in Genesis 1:2 “the earth WAS desolation and waste”, does not refer to the earth becoming such but rather simply states a condition existing in past time. Here the idea of becoming is wholly missing. The same is true in the phrase, “And his wife looked from behind him, and she was a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:26). The Hebrew with its expression of instantaneousness is far stronger than the English. On the other hand, when the preposition is employed, the word is rightly translated “become”. In Exodus 6:7, for example, we should render, “And I shall take you to me for a people, and I shall be to you for God (i.e., I shall become your God) and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of Egypt”. The idea of activism, therefore, is not necessarily inherent in the verb itself.


We may consequently render *I am who I am* as the Vulgate has done. The phrase expresses the aseity of God; it tells us what His true nature is. Despite the activism and dynamism of modern theology, there is good warrant and evidence for insisting that this concept *I AM* is present in the verbal form, *'eh-yeh*. This is not to say that the form in itself might not be rendered *I SHALL BE*, but the interpretation which adhered to the word from the first is one which expresses God's aseity. Thus, the Greek has translated THE BEING ONE (*ό ὄν*). It is this concept which also underlies and forms the basis for such expressions as "*I am the LORD*". Indeed, the purpose of Moses' ministry is that both the Israelites and the Egyptians may know that "*I am the LORD*". We meet this emphasis again in the second part of Isaiah when the Lord says, for example, "*For I the LORD am your God*", or "*I am the LORD thy God*" (Isaiah 41:13). The frequent assertion in these chapters of Isaiah's prophecy that "*I am the LORD*" clearly harks back to the revelation of the NAME given at Sinai. When we come to the New Testament, we find that Jesus Christ went to the heart of the question with His assertion: "*Before Abraham was I AM*". Here the very essence of the NAME is expressed. *'Eh-yeh* is the BEING ONE, He who IS. And now we can see the significance of the sentence, "*I am who I am*". God is the BEING ONE, and therefore He is ever the same; inasmuch as He alone is eternal, forever the same, He alone is the BEING ONE. Augustine has well brought out the thought: "*Quid est ego sum qui sum, nisi aeternus sum. Quid est ego sum qui sum, nisi mutari non possum*. Malachi evidently reflected upon this passage in Exodus when he wrote, "*For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed*".

To stress the fact that the aseity of God is present in this remarkable word has been necessary. It has particularly

44 Codex B. έγώ είμι σύν ο ὄν.
45 In the Gospel of John particularly, our Lord seems to have dwelt upon this passage. Cf. John 6:48, 51; 8:58; 10:9, 11; 11:25, etc.
been necessary in the light of the terrific power that the theology of dynamism and activism have exerted upon the interpretation of the Bible in recent days. Against that influence we do protest, for we feel that it is a baneful one. Instead of allowing the Bible to speak for itself, it seeks to compel the Bible to speak with its own voice.

At the same time we realize full well that what we have hitherto said does not do full justice to the revelation of the NAME. The whole context precludes the idea that the 'eh-yeh is an impersonal, hard, abstract substance, somewhat like Aristotle's unmoved mover or the hard-rock Allah of the Koran. The concern of the people in asking after the Name of God was to discover what relation this God sustained to themselves. Of what help would He be in this very present time of trouble? Unless the revelation concerns itself with the question of the people and offers them a satisfying answer — that is, not necessarily an answer that will satisfy them, but an answer which in itself is satisfactory — it becomes a mockery. The people were not interested merely in a question of metaphysics; they were interested above all in the practical matter of how the One who claimed to be the God of the Fathers could be of aid to them.

In the light of this fact we must note that the revelation expressed in the word 'eh-yeh and also in yah-weh makes clear that the idea of pure, unchangeable being is no mere abstract concept but is something quite practical. In wondrous grace God reveals His nature to man in so far as it determines what God is for His people. Thus in the Name the people would have a pledge and earnest of the gracious deliverance which God alone could bring and would bring to them.

The very fact that God speaks makes clear that He is no mere impersonal force. Rather, as this context compels one to recognize, He is the living and true God. In contrast to the idols which had no life and could not move, Yahweh is the eternal, living One. He changes not, yet He is living and can reveal Himself to His creation. He will make known to Moses and to the children of Israel what kind of God He is by means of the deeds which He will perform in their midst and by means of the words which He will speak unto them. These words and deeds are such that only one who in all His attributes and
perfections is infinite, eternal and unchangeable can perform them. In His revelation the *I AM* makes Himself known to His people. Thus, He declares to the Israelites, "Ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Exodus 6:7b). As a result of the revelation of power — a revelation accompanied by words — God's people would know that the One who had delivered them was no mere idol, the creation of men's hands, but the eternal, ever living one, the true Creator of heaven and earth, who did with His creation according to His will. Such a God they would and should worship. Indeed, this was to be the result of the revelation, "Ye shall worship God upon this mountain" (Exodus 3:12).

A further point remains to be noted. God declares, "This is My Name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations". By the use of the word NAME reference is had to the objective revelation of the divine nature. When God wrought mighty wonders, there would be objectively displayed the divine majesty and glory of the ONE who IS. Likewise the word MEMORIAL referred to the subjective recognition of that divine nature upon the part of man. Thus, when God displayed His power in redemption the Israelites would recognize that the One whose glory was thus displayed was the LORD, the eternal one, "who changeth never".

At this point, however, a minor problem arises. That the Israelites would know that Yahweh had delivered them is easily understandable. He had revealed Himself to them, both in word and in deed, and we may not doubt that He Himself would have made them willing and able to believe in Him. What, however, shall we say about the Egyptians? The Israelites will know that Yahweh is their God, but the Egyptians are said merely to know that Yahweh has brought judgment upon them. The Egyptians would have known that the God of the Hebrews had brought judgment upon them and that He was far more powerful than their own gods. As to the rich meaning of the NAME which Israel could know, we may be sure that Egypt did not have such knowledge. At the same time they would know that the One who spoke to Moses was Yahweh. Judgment is not without meaning,
and when the final judgment falls, the wicked will acknowledge that God is just.

Thus at the burning bush God gave to Moses the revelation of His NAME. In His historical revelations He is absolutely independent of His creation, the self-existent one, who manifests in deeds of wonder the nature of His being expressed in His Name. Thus, in a certain sense, we may agree with Holwerda's translation, "I am, I the God who appears in action". Yet, as quoted by Stellingwerff, this does not go far enough. At the burning bush there appeared to Moses One who is eternal, who changeth not, who depends not upon His creation, but in sovereign and supreme majesty, exists independently of that creation. He, the BEING ONE, is unchangeable; yet He is the living and true God. In His revelation of deliverance He displays the glory of His majesty, the blessed truth that He alone is the I AM.

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