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Offprint from:
James K. Hoffmeier, Alan R. Millard, and Gary A. Rendsburg, eds.
"Did I Not Bring Israel Out of Egypt?" *Biblical, Archaeological,
and Egyptological Perspectives on the Exodus Narratives*
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Chapter 7

The Literary Unity of the Exodus Narrative

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Most modern biblical scholars remain wedded to the classic Documentary Hypothesis, which seeks to explain the so-called duplications and contradictions in the Torah by assigning different portions to different authors or schools. There is no doubt that this approach works well regarding the legal-cultic material, for quite obviously the Priestly material spanning Exod 25–Num 10 (P) stands in stark contradistinction to the presentation in the book of Deuteronomy (D).¹ When we turn our eye to narrative prose within the Pentateuch, however, we must acknowledge that the literary approach to the Bible, which began in the 1970s and continues to the present day, offers a major challenge to those who would divide the narratives into three separate sources: Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), and Priestly (P). Robert Alter has written about this most eloquently,² and I have contributed to the topic as well with my monograph on the book of Genesis.³

The present essay is devoted to the Exodus narrative, comprising chaps. 1–14, though with most of our attention dedicated to the plagues narrative in chaps. 7–12. In line with earlier studies, I plan to demonstrate that the

1. However, I reject the regnant view, which dates D to the late 7th century BCE (reign of Josiah, to be more specific) and P to the 6th or 5th century BCE (the Exile or beyond). I prefer to see both sources as coeval approaches during the First Temple Period (without pinning a particular century to either), in much the same way that the Pharisee and Sadducee approaches coexisted at the end of the Second Temple period.

2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 131–54 (the chapter entitled “Composite Artistry”) = idem, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (updated and rev. ed.; New York: Basic Books, 2011), 163–92. At a distance of three-plus decades, Alter has qualified his earlier position (see p. xi of the 2011 edition), though the argument remains basically the same. At least some of the impetus for this shift derives from conversations with his colleague Ronald Hendel (oral communication), who remains committed to the JEDP Theory.

3. Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986; reprint, with a new foreword, 2014).

literary reading of this material yields a narrative unity for this section of the Torah. I will present different approaches that, to my mind, converge to prove the point. In arguing against the division of Exod 1–14 into J, E, and P sources, I will use as my interlocutors two major devotees of the Documentary Hypothesis: one classic commentator and leading Hebraist of his day, S. R. Driver; and one contemporary scholar who has addressed both scholarly and general audiences on the matter, Richard Elliott Friedman. As we shall see, these two scholars differ in their assignment of selected passages to the individual sources—in particular the non-P material within the plagues narrative. This is true of source critics generally, though to keep the argumentation simple, I will cite only Driver and Friedman below, without incorporating into the picture the opinions of others either past or present.⁴

The Plagues as Pairs

As others have noted previously,⁵ the ten plagues may be seen as five pairs of plagues, with each member of the pair corresponding to its mate. In chart form:

1. Blood	3. Lice	5. Pestilence	7. Hail	9. Darkness
2. Frogs	4. Insect Swarms	6. Boils	8. Locusts	10. Firstborn

The first two plagues are connected to the Nile River; the third and fourth plagues are both insects;⁶ the third pair comprises different diseases; each member of the fourth pair is a calamity that originates in the sky and that devours crops; and finally, the last two plagues are connected by darkness, with number nine being darkness itself during the daytime and number ten occurring at midnight.

If the arrangement of the plagues were due to the haphazard compilation of three different sources, one would not expect this pattern to obtain. As intimated above, devotees of the J-E-P division do not agree on the assignment of the individual plagues. In Driver's view, the ten plagues are mainly J and P, with some E; while Friedman opines that the plagues are chiefly E and P, with some R (that is, the Redactor).⁷ And while this point

4. Though one other contemporary scholar who deserves mention here is Joel Baden, with two books on the subject: *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch* (FAT, 68; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); and *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (Anchor Bible Reference Library; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). We will have occasion to cite the former work on several occasions below. In addition, see below, n. 9 for reference to Martin Noth, as channeled through Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien.

5. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 93.

6. On the identity of the fourth plague, see Gary A. Rendsburg, "Beasts or Bugs? Solving the Problem of the Fourth Plague," *BR* 19 (April 2003): 18–23.

7. S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribner's, 1913), 24–28. See also the convenient chart based on Driver's analysis in Moshe

by itself does not represent sufficient cause to upset the entire J-E-P apple cart, it nevertheless raises an eyebrow: if the source critics themselves cannot agree on the basic elements, then perhaps an entirely new approach is worth consideration.

In this particular case, it is worth considering how the source division would work with the design noted above. Driver's analysis yields the following:

- | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Blood (J) | 3. Lice (P) | 5. Pestilence (J) | 7. Hail (J) | 9. Darkness (E) |
| 2. Frogs (J) | 4. Insect Swarm (J) | 6. Boils (P) | 8. Locusts (J) | 10. Firstborn (J) ⁸ |

Note that only the first and fourth pairs of plagues stem from the same voice, with the other pairs crossing the traditional source boundaries. Friedman's analysis looks like this:

- | | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Blood (E) | 3. Lice (P) | 5. Pestilence (E) | 7. Hail (E) | 9. Darkness (E) |
| 2. Frogs (E) | 4. Insect Swarm (E) | 6. Boils (P) | 8. Locusts (E) | 10. Firstborn (E) |

In this scenario, three pairs of plagues (first, fourth, and fifth) derive from the same source, though the other two pairs divide. In addition, these two charts allow one to see the point made above: Driver assigned most of the non-P material to J (the exception is the plague of darkness, attributed to E); while Friedman assigns all of the non-P material to E.⁹

The Plagues as Triads

A second pattern is visible in the plagues narrative, one that divides the first nine plagues into three sets of three each,¹⁰ with the tenth plague

Greenberg and S. David Sperling, "Exodus, Book of," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2nd ed.; Detroit: Macmillan, 2007), 6.619.

Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003), 130–40, with extensive discussion in two notes on preceding pages, 125 n. ** (to be quoted below), and 126 n. *. As pointed out by Baden (*J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 273–74), there has been a general trend among J-E-P theorists in recent years to see only two sources in the plagues narrative, in contrast to earlier scholars, such as Driver, who identified three sources.

8. Both here and below, when I refer to the tenth plague, concerning the death of the firstborn, I intend both the prediction of the plague in 11:1–8 and the event itself in 12:29–30.

9. Note that a standard work on the subject, Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), presents the source division according to Martin Noth, which in turn is quite close to that of S. R. Driver, except for the fact that Driver countenanced E material in the plagues narrative, which Noth denied. The reader can access Noth's system in one of two ways: (a) in chart form in Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 268–69 (within the section entitled "Translator's Supplement: Analytical Outline of the Pentateuch," not included in the German original); and (b) in narrative form in Campbell and O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch*, 38–39 (for P), 136–42 (for J).

10. This arrangement was noted already by both Rashbam (1085–1158) and Abarbanel (1437–1508). See also Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 93; and Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 76–77.

standing outside this configuration as the climactic event. The defining feature in this design is whether or not Pharaoh is forewarned of each impending plague, and if he is forewarned, when, where, and how is the warning expressed. In the first member of each triad, Moses is to position himself before Pharaoh in the morning; in the second member of each triad, the warning is a general one, without a specific time and position indicated; and in the third member of each triad, no warning is given. Hence, we read as follows:¹¹

1. **Exod 7:15**

לך אל־פְּרֹעֶה בְּבֹקֶר הַיּוֹם יֵצֵא הַמִּיֶּמֶה וְנִצַּבְתָּ לְקִרְאתוֹ עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר וְהִמָּטָה
אֲשֶׁר־נִהְפֶּךָ לְנֶחֱשׁ תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ:

Go to Pharaoh in the morning—behold, he (will be) coming out to the water—and you shall position (yourself) to greet him at the edge of the Nile; and the staff that turned into a snake, you shall take in your hand.

2. **Exod 7:26**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פְּרֹעֶה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי
וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Come to Pharaoh, and you shall say to him, “Thus says Yhwh: Send-forth my people, so that they may worship me.”

3. [no warning]

4. **Exod 8:16**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִשְׁכֵּם בְּבֹקֶר וְהִתְיַצַּב לִפְנֵי פְּרֹעֶה הַיּוֹם יֵצֵא הַמִּיֶּמֶה וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Arise-early in the morning and position yourself before Pharaoh—behold he (will be) coming out to the water—and you shall say to him, “Thus says Yhwh: Send-forth my people, so that they may worship me.”

5. **Exod 9:1**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פְּרֹעֶה וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֶלְהֵי הָעִבְרִים
שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Come to Pharaoh, and you shall speak

11. Verse numbers here and throughout the article follow the Hebrew tradition. English verse numbers differ in chaps. 7–8 especially. Note that MT 7:26–29 = Eng. 8:1–4, so that MT 8:1–28 = Eng. 8:5–32.

to him, ‘Thus says Yhwh the God of the Hebrews: Send-forth my people, so that they may worship me.’”

6. [no warning]

7. **Exod 9:13**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִשָּׁמֶם בְּבִקְרֹךְ וְהִתְנַצֵּב לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה-אָמַר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַח אֶת-עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Arise-early in the morning and position yourself before Pharaoh; and you shall say to him, ‘Thus says Yhwh the God of the Hebrews: Send-forth my people, so that they may worship me.’”

8. **Exod 10:1**

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי-אָנֹכִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת-לְבוֹ וְאֶת-לֵב עַבְדֶּיךָ
לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְחִי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבִּי:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made-heavy his heart, and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these my signs in their midst.”

9. [no warning]

Now, it is true that, according to the classic source division, plagues 1–2 / 4–5 / 7–8 (that is, those with warnings) are assigned to the same source (J by Driver; E by Friedman), which means that the pattern just noted could be dovetailed with the Documentary Hypothesis. But the design breaks down when we consider plagues 3 / 6 / 9 — that is, plagues without warning. For, according to the source critics, while the third and sixth plagues are assigned to P (so far, so good), the ninth plague is allocated by Driver mainly to E, with some J verses, and by Friedman to E wholly (oops).

Number of Verses for Each Plague

Scott Noegel observed yet another pattern among the ten plagues¹² — namely, the manner in which the number of verses devoted to each plague, especially when divided into the three triads, increases, with particular attention to the seventh plague:

1.	11	4.	13	7.	23	
2.	16	5.	7	8.	20	10. 10+(28)+14
3.	4	6.	5	9.	9	
	31		25		52	

12. Scott Noegel, “The Significance of the Seventh Plague,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 532–39.

One must admit that the pattern is not perfect, for the first triad comprises 31 verses, the second one 25 verses, and third one 52 verses. If the pattern were perfect, one would expect fewer verses accorded to plague two than to plague five, but such is not the case, as the chart indicates. The reason for this is that the second plague includes two factors: (a) the ability of the Egyptian magicians to produce frogs as well (see also plague one); and (b) the give-and-take between Pharaoh and Moses as the former bids the latter to remove the pesky amphibians from his realm.

That aside, however, we note the growth in narrative bulk from plague one to plague four to plague seven (each at the head of the triad), and from plague three to plague six to plague nine (each at the end of the triad). In addition, among the three corresponding pericopes at the center of each triad, clearly more space is devoted to plague eight than is dedicated to plagues two and five. The result is that the plagues build in narrative size as one progresses through the long account. This, in turn, follows the growth in the nature of the plagues, which commence with nuisances (blood, frogs, lice, insects), then shift to diseases (boils, cattle pestilence), and finally progress to major calamities (crop-destroying locusts and hail, severe sandstorm,¹³ death of the firstborn). As such, we may consider the plagues narrative as an instance of “form following content.”¹⁴

Noegel’s more specific contribution to the picture is the especial nature accorded to the seventh plague. Note the following points, summarized here in succinct fashion:

- 9:13–19 — the longest divine speech in the plagues account.
- 9:14 — upgrade in the warning: *כִּי בַפְעֻם הַזֶּה אֶנִּי שֹׁלְחַן אֶת־כָּל־מִגְפֹתַי אֵלֶיךָ*, “for this time I am sending all my plagues unto you heart.”
- 9:14 — new declaration: *בְּעִבּוֹר תֵּדַע כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹנִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ*, “so that you will know that there is none like me in all the earth.”¹⁵
- 9:16 — explanation given: *וְאוֹלָם בְּעִבּוֹר זֹאת הֵעִמְדֹתִיךָ בְּעִבּוֹר הַרְאֵתִיךָ אֶת־: כִּהְיִי וּלְמַעַן סַפֵּר שְׁמִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ*: “Indeed, it is for this (reason) that I have caused you to stand, to show you my power, and in order that my name shall resound in all the land.”
- 9:27 — first time Pharaoh repents: *חָטָאתִי הַפְעַם יְהוָה הַצַּדִּיק וְאֲנִי וְעַמִּי: הִרְשָׁעִים*, “I have sinned this time; Yhwh is righteous, and I and my people are wicked.”

13. This is the prime candidate for the plague of “darkness.” One may recall the very vivid portrayal of an Egyptian sandstorm in the film *The English Patient* (1986), though the novel by Michael Ondaatje places less emphasis on this scene.

14. For further instances, see my article “How Could a Torah Scroll Have Included the Word *זעטוטי*?” *Textus: Annual of the Hebrew University Bible Project* (forthcoming).

15. See earlier Exod 8:6: *לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי־אֵין כִּיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ*, “so that you will know that there is none like Yhwh our God.”

- 9:28—Pharaoh allows the people to leave: וְאַשְׁלַחְהָ אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תִסְפּוּן לָעֵמֹד, “so that I may send you forth, and you need not stand any longer.”
- 9:34—upgrade: וַיִּכְבֵּד לִבּוֹ הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו, “and he hardened his heart, his and that of his servants.”

As seen in other instances in the Bible, in a list of ten items, a special role is conferred upon the items in positions seven and ten. Note the following:¹⁶

- Gen 5 Enoch (7)—Noah (10)
- Ruth 4 Boaz (7)—David (10)
- Gen 15 Amorites (7)—Jebusites (10)
- Exod 7–12 hail (7)—death of the firstborn (10)

This will explain the special quality to the narration of plague seven (9:13–35), both in size (the longest at 23 verses) and in content (see the seven bullet points above).

Now, once more, if one were to follow the Documentary Hypothesis, in any of its varieties, none of what we have stated in this section would apply. As noted above, Driver assigned most of the plagues to J but plagues three and six to P; while Friedman allots most of the plagues to E, but once more, numbers three and six to P, which means that the non-P tradition, in either case, would comprise only eight plagues (with no lice and no boils), so that the scheme with pride of place given to numbers seven and ten would play no role whatsoever in the original sources.

Now, it is of course possible that the three patterns presented here—the plagues as pairs, the plagues as triads, and the use of the 7/10 scheme to highlight two specific catastrophes—are the work of a redactor who combined the hypothetical sources into a unitary whole. But if this were the case, would it not be easier simply to speak of the grand narrative as the product of a single author with planned literary design? Why go to the trouble to subdivide the narrative into theoretical component parts? The Exodus narrative, after all, is an actual literary artifice; the hypothesized sources are only that: hypothetical, with no proven reality.

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

We next turn to the different verbs used to express the hardening of Pharaoh's heart within the Exodus narrative (including three instances from before the start of the plagues segment). The three verbs are as follows:

16. The first example was identified by both Benno Jacob and Umberto Cassuto; the second one by both Bezalel Porten and Jack Sasson; and the third one by me, “Notes of Genesis XV,” *VT* 42 (1992): 268–70. For the references to Jacob, Cassuto, Porten, and Sasson, see my article, pp. 271–72 nn. 20–21. The fourth item on this list, of course, is at the center of Noegel's “Significance of the Seventh Plague.”

חזק *hzaq*, “strong / strengthen”
 קשה *qsh*, “harden”
 כבד *kbd*, “heavy, make-heavy”

occurring in the following litany of verses:

Exod 4:21 (en route from Midian to Egypt)

וְאֲנִי אַחֲזַק אֶת־לְבוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

And I will strengthen his heart, and he will not send-forth the people.

Exod 7:3 (before staff-to-crocodile trick)

וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה

And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh.

Exod 7:13 (after staff-to-crocodile trick)

וַיַּחֲזֹק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:

And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.

Exod 7:14 (introduction to plague no. 1)

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כִּבֵּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם:

And Yhwh said to Moses, “The heart of Pharaoh is heavy; he refuses to send-forth the people.”

Exod 7:22 (after plague no. 1)

וַיַּחֲזֹק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:

And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.

Exod 8:11 (after plague no. 2)

וַיַּכְבֵּד אֶת־לְבוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:

And he made-heavy his heart / and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.

Exod 8:15 (after plague no. 3)

וַיַּחֲזֹק לֵב־פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה:

And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.

Exod 8:28 (after plague no. 4)

וַיַּכְבֵּד פַּרְעֹה אֶת־לְבוֹ גַם בַּפְּעַם הַזֹּאת וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

And Pharaoh made-heavy his heart also this time, and he did not send-forth the people.

Exod 9:7 (after plague no. 5)

וַיַּכְבֵּד לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם:

And the heart of Pharaoh was heavy, and he did not send-forth the people.

Exod 9:12 (after plague no. 6)

וַיַּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה:

And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken to Moses.

Exod 9:34 (after plague no. 7)

וַיִּכְבֵּד לְבוֹ הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו:

And he made-heavy his heart, he and his servants.

Exod 9:35 (after plague no. 7)

וַיַּחֲזַק לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה:

And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel, as Yhwh had spoken via the hand of Moses.

Exod 10:1 (introduction to plague no. 8)

כִּי־אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת־לְבוֹ וְאֶת־לֵב עַבְדָּיו לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְתִּי אֵלֶּה בְּקִרְבוֹ:

For I have made-heavy his heart, and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these my signs in their midst.

Exod 10:20 (after plague no. 8)

וַיַּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel.

Exod 10:27 (after plague no. 9)

וַיַּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא אָבָה לְשַׁלְּחָם:

And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not consent to send-forth them.

Exod 11:10 (after warning to plague no. 10)

וַיַּחֲזַק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶצוֹ:

And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel from his land.

According to the source-critical approach, the different verbs serve to distinguish the hypothesized sources. In his day, Driver assigned the different verbs to different sources, as follows:¹⁷

חזק *hʒq*, “strong / strengthen”—P and E

קשה *qšb*, “harden”—P (only 7:3)

כבד *kbd*, “heavy, make-heavy”—J

17. Driver, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 25, 26, 28 (for the individual comments re P, J, and E, respectively).

In general, this pattern holds up, though not without some difficulties. For example, why does P elect to use *חזק* *hʒq*, “strong/strengthen,” throughout (Exod 7:13, 22; 8:15; 9:12; 11:10) but *קשה* *qšh*, “harden,” in the one passage, at 7:3? Then there is the fact that both P and E use the verb *חזק* *hʒq*, “strong/strengthen,” which thus requires a second set of criteria to disentangle these two presumed sources. This is accomplished by observing that P “usually”¹⁸ includes the statement *וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה*, “and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken” (7:13, 22; 8:15; 9:12—in the last of these, the phrase *אֶל-מֹשֶׁה*, “to Moses,” is appended), whereas E uses a different formula, to wit, 9:35, *וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה בְּיַד-מֹשֶׁה*, “and he did not send-forth the children of Israel, as Yhwh had spoken via the hand of Moses”; 10:20, *וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*, “and he did not send-forth the children of Israel.”¹⁹

But then this pattern breaks down in the last two statements of the plagues narrative, for in 10:27, presumed-E writes *וְלֹא אָבִה לְשַׁלְּחָם*, “and he did not consent to send-forth them,” thereby introducing a variant to his formula, even if the verb *šlh*, “send-forth” (Piel), is retained; and then much more seriously, in 11:10, presumed-P uses the phrase typically employed by presumed-E, to wit, *וְלֹא-שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם*, “and he did not send-forth the children of Israel from his land,” as opposed to his own formula, “and he did not listen to them.” For my own approach to these variant phrases, see below; for now, one need only comment that the problems presented in this paragraph speak for themselves.

Friedman no doubt senses some of these issues, because he seeks to resolve them, though in doing so he must tread a tortuous path. He writes at length:

[4:21b] is the first occurrence of a formula used by R to organize the E and P accounts of the plagues into a united narrative, thus: The E accounts of the plagues of the insect swarm and the livestock epidemic conclude, “And Pharaoh’s heart was heavy, and he did not let the people go” (8:28, 9:7). The P accounts of the plagues of lice and boils and also the P accounts of the staffs becoming serpents conclude, “And Pharaoh’s heart was strong, and he did not listen to them—as Yhwh had spoken” (7:13, 8:15, 9:12). The plague of blood is both E and P, and it concludes with the P formulation: “And Pharaoh’s heart was heavy, and he did not let the people go.” The plague of frogs is also combined E and P, and it ends in 8:11 both with part of the E conclusion (“he made his heart heavy”) and with part of the P conclusion (“he did not listen to them—as Yhwh had spoken”). It is not surprising that P accounts have the P conclusion, E accounts have the E conclusion, and combined accounts have either a P or a combined conclu-

18. Ibid., 28.

19. Ibid., 28.

sion. But then the E plague of hail has what has been the P conclusion, “And Pharaoh’s heart was strong, and he did not let the children of Israel go—as Yhwh had spoken” (9:35). Then the E plagues of locusts and darkness also conclude with a P formula (10:20, 27), and the final meeting between Moses and Pharaoh that ensues is likewise an E text followed by a P conclusion. It appears that the Redactor has combined the P and the E accounts of the plagues and has united them by drawing on the P formula and distributing it through the combined version. This is confirmed by the fact that the formula also appears here in 4:21b. It is awkward in this context, and again it is a formula derived from P in the middle of an E text.

To help us better understand Friedman’s approach, it may be helpful to chart the afore-cited Exodus passages (this time in English translation only), with Friedman’s source-assignment noted in each instance.

4:21 (en route from Midian to Egypt), “And I will strengthen his heart, and he will not send-forth the people.” (*R, as single verse in the midst of E*)²⁰

7:3 (before staff-to-crocodile trick), “And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh.” (*P at start of P account*)

7:13 (after staff-to-crocodile trick), “And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.” (*P at end of P account*)

7:14 (introduction to plague no. 1), “And Yhwh said to Moses, “The heart of Pharaoh is heavy, he refuses to send-forth the people.” (*E at start of E account*)

7:22 (after plague no. 1), “And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.” (*P within interwoven E and P accounts*)

8:11 (after plague no. 2), “And he made-heavy his heart / and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.” (*E at end of E account / R in second half of verse*)

8:15 (after plague no. 3), “And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken.” (*P at end of P account*)

8:28 (after plague no. 4), “And Pharaoh made-heavy his heart also this time, and he did not send-forth the people.” (*E at end of E account*)

9:7 (after plague no. 5), “And the heart of Pharaoh was heavy, and he did not send-forth the people.” (*E at end of E account*)

20. On the issues surrounding this verse, see also Baden, *J, E, and the Redaction of the Pentateuch*, 273–75.

9:12 (after plague no. 6), “And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken to Moses.” (*P at end of P account*)

9:34 (after plague no. 7), “And he made-heavy his heart, he and his servants.” (*E at end of E account*)

9:35 (after plague no. 7), “And the heart of Pharaoh was strong, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel, as Yhwh had spoken via the hand of Moses.” (*R at end of E account*)

10:1 (introduction to plague no. 8), “For I have made-heavy his heart, and the heart of his servants, in order that I may place these my signs in their midst.” (*E at start of E account*)

10:20 (after plague no. 8), “And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel.” (*R at end of E account*)

10:27 (after plague no. 9), “And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not consent to send-forth them.” (*R at end of E account*)

11:10 (after warning to plague no. 10), “And Yhwh strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not send-forth the children of Israel from his land.” (*R at end of E account*)

Which is to say, inconsistency in the employment of the key verbs and key conclusions is explained by the hand of the redactor (R). Thus, for example, the difficulties inherent in Driver’s analysis regarding 10:27 and 11:10, noted above, disappear in Friedman’s analysis, since he assumes that the redactor has leveled all apparent inconsistencies.²¹ With all due respect to an important contributor to biblical studies, the only words that come to mind when I read the long quotation above are “too clever by half.”

To my mind, none of these machinations is necessary, especially once we recognize the employment of the (admittedly under-recognized) literary device of repetition with variation. Throughout biblical literature, in all of its genres, the ancient Israelite literati went to great lengths to vary their language whenever possible.²² The best way to understand the different phraseologies listed above is to posit a single author who demonstrated

21. See similarly *ibid.*, 279–81.

22. See my two articles on the subject: “Variation in Biblical Hebrew Prose and Poetry,” in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin* (ed. Maxine L. Grossman; Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 197–226; and “Repetition with Variation in Legal-Cultic Texts of the Torah,” *Marbeh Hōkmaḥ: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Loving Memory of Victor Avigdor Hurowitz* (2 vols.; ed. Shamir Yona et al.; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 1.435–64.

his virtuosity at every turn. Through such technical brilliance, he no doubt dazzled his audience, as they listened to the reading of the national epic narrative in ancient Israel.²³

At the same time, however, our author intentionally did not vary his language with one key phrase, to wit, the repeated clause *וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים כְּאֲשֶׁר* *וְדָבַר יְהוָה* “and he [Pharaoh] did not listen to them, as Yhwh had spoken” (7:13, 22; 8:11, 15; 9:12). The effect of the verbatim repetition is to reflect Pharaoh’s obstinacy. He does not change, and the language does not change—another stellar example of “form follows content.” True, in the last of the verses listed above (9:12), the text includes an additional phrase at the end, *אֶל־מֹשֶׁה*, “to Moses”—hence, not quite verbatim repetition in the final instance, but we are able to explain the departure from the norm as a way of marking closure. As Aharon Mirsky demonstrated, in the last of a list of repeated, parallel, or similar expressions, ancient Hebrew style demanded a slight change;²⁴ to the list of examples that he provided, I would add Exod 9:12.

In short, the source critics are on the wrong path altogether. None of these variations has to do with different sources; rather, they are inherent to ancient Hebrew literary style.

Leitwort (“Leading Word”)

We owe the concept of the *Leitwort* to the research of Martin Buber into biblical literary style.²⁵ The term refers to a “leading word,” which appears in different episodes of a single narrative, with the goal of uniting said (sometimes disparate) episodes into a cohesive whole. The word *בַּת bat*, “daughter” (plural *בָּנוֹת banot*, “daughters”) functions in this manner in the first two chapters of Exodus.²⁶ It occurs 11x in the following passages:

23. For an imagined pastoral setting of such a reading, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 90–91 (p. 114 in the revised and updated edition). In a more urban environment, I could imagine an audience gathered in the piazza at the city gate (the one place within the city walls with sufficient open space) for such readings.

24. Aharon Mirsky, “Stylistic Device for Conclusion in Hebrew,” *Semitics* 5 (1977): 9–23. I presented many more examples in my talk entitled “Marking Closure” at the Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, Amsterdam, July 2012. For brief discussion in one of my publications, see “The Two Screens: On Mary Douglas’s Proposal for a Literary Structure to the Book of Leviticus,” *JSS* 15 (2008): 175–89, esp. pp. 187–88.

25. Martin Buber, “*Leitwort* Style in Pentateuch Narrative,” in Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation* (trans. Lawrence Rosenwald with Everett Fox; Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 114–28 (based on a German lecture delivered in January 1927). A second relevant essay from the same collection is Martin Buber, “*Leitwort* and Discourse Type: An Example,” in *ibid.*, 143–50 (originally written in 1935). For general orientation, see Shemaryahu Talmon, “Martin Buber’s Ways of Interpreting the Bible,” *JFS* 27 (1976): 195–209, even if Talmon did not mention the *Leitwort* technique specifically.

26. Here and throughout this article, I use a simplified method of transliteration.

1:16

אִם־בֵּן הוּא וְהַמָּתֵן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הִיא וְחָיָה:

And if it is a son, you shall kill him, and if it is a daughter (*bat*), she may live.

1:22

כָּל־הַבֵּן הַיְלֹוד הַיְאָרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל־הַבַּת תַּחֲיֶיהָ:

Every newborn son, into the Nile you shall cast him, and every daughter (*bat*) you shall let-live.

2:1

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בַּת־לֵוִי:

And a man from the house (*bet*) of Levi went, and he took a daughter (*bat*) of Levi.

2:5 (see also vv. 7, 8, 9, 10)

וַתֵּרַד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לְרַחֵץ עַל־הַיָּאֹר

And the daughter (*bat*) of Pharaoh went-down to bathe at the Nile.

2:16

וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַת בָּנוֹת

And to the priest of Midian were seven daughters (*banot*).

2:20

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בָּנוֹתָיו וְאֵי

And he said to his daughters (*banotaw*), "Where is he?"

2:21

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־צִפּוֹרָה בַּתוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה:

And he gave Zippora his daughter (*bitto*) to Moses.

In addition, the author of this material used two rare words that contain the same syllable, *bat*,²⁷ in order to draw further attention to the *Leitwort*, as follows:

1:21

וַיְהִי כִּי־יִרְאוּ הַמְּלִידֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:

27. Though I admit that, in the first example below, the vowel of the first syllable in *בָּתִּים* is pronounced with a slightly different vowel in the Masoretic system (*qames*, as opposed to *patah*).

And it was, when the midwives feared God, and he made for them houses (*battim*).²⁸

2:3

וַתִּקַּח-לוֹ תִּבְתַּת גִּמְזָא

And she took for him a papyrus basket (*tebat*).²⁹

Plus he used the rare phrase לְיִי בֵּית *bet lewi*, “house of Levi,” in Exod 2:1 (see above) to produce additional alliteration.³⁰ All of this bespeaks a single author weaving together his text, as the early life of Moses proceeds from episode to episode: Pharaoh’s decree > the role of the midwives > his parents’ marriage > life in the basket > saved and adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter > flight to Midian > encounter with Jethro’s daughters > marriage to Zipporah.³¹

As the reader will anticipate by now, the division of the text into separate sources removes this device. Not so much with Driver, who assigns all of 1:15 through 2:14 (except for 1:20b) to E, so that the *Leitwort* still works to some extent—though without the last episode included, since 2:15–23a is assigned to J. But this is certainly the result of Friedman’s dissection, which yields E as the author of 1:15–21 and J as the one responsible for 1:22–2:23a. In his system, the initial use of בַּת *bat*, “daughter,” in 1:16 has no resonance through the remainder of these chapters, except for the use of the alliterative בְּתִיִּם *battim*, “houses,” in 1:21. True, the *Leitwort* may still operate within the J material, but without the first instance of the word in 1:16, much is lost.

In fact, even more is lost with the source-critical approach to this material in Exod 1–2. The reader is supposed to apprehend the irony, namely:

28. On the meaning of this term in Exod 1:21, see Shalom M. Paul, “Exodus 1:21: ‘To Found a Family’: A Biblical and Akkadian Idiom,” *Maarav* 8 (1992; *Let Your Colleagues Praise You: Studies in Memory of Stanley Gevirtz*, part 2; ed. Robert J. Ratner et al.): 139–42; reprinted in Shalom M. Paul, *Divre Sbalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East, 1967–2005* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 177–80.

29. On the significance of this term in Exod 2:3, see the section below, “Interconnections between Exodus 1–2 and Genesis 1–9.”

30. The phrase occurs elsewhere only in Num 17:23 and Zech 12:13. The normal expressions are “tribe of Levi” (using either of the two synonyms מְנַשֶּׁה [Num 1:49; 3:6; 17:18] or שְׁבֵט [Deut 10:8; 18:1; Josh 13:14, 33; 1 Chr 23:14]) or בְּנֵי לֵוִי, “sons of Levi” (passim, including in narrative texts [Exod 32:26; 32:28; Num 16:7, 8, 10]).

31. I have treated this material, albeit from a different angle, in an earlier essay; see my “Literary Approach to the Bible and Finding a Good Translation,” in *Biblical Translation in Context* (ed. Frederick W. Knobloch; Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2002), 179–94, esp. pp. 182–84. As observed in this earlier essay, many English translations mask the repeated use of בַּת *bat* in Exod 1–2 by rendering the key word “girl,” “woman,” “daughter,” etc., so that the *Leitwort* is not apprehended by English readers. As one would expect, Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift*, vol. 1: *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung* (originally published 1926; Gerlingen: Schneider, 1976), 154–56, rendered בַּת *bat* consistently as *Tochter*, “daughter.”

Pharaoh decreed that every “daughter” may live (1:16, 22), and indeed it is “daughters” (of Levi, of Pharaoh, and of Jethro—in addition to other females: Moses’s mother [2:2–3, 8–9], Pharaoh’s daughter’s handmaid [2:5], and Moses’s sister [2:4, 7–8]) who are responsible for the life of Moses.

The story of Exod 1–14 is the “birth of a nation” (note the expression עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “the people of the children of Israel” in Exod 1:8 [ironically in the mouth of Pharaoh], used to drive home the point), and since women are the birth-givers of the world, they therefore play such a prominent role at the outset of the narrative.³² While the source-critical approach (of either Driver or Friedman and presumably of others as well) may capture a part of this, only the holistic reading of Exod 1–2 brings this point to the fore in a major way.

Upgrade within Exodus

As is well known, when God commissions Moses to be the leader of the Israelites on Mount Horeb and grants him the ability to transform his staff into a reptile, the word used in the text is שֵׁנָּה *nahaš*, “snake” (Exod 4:3). When Moses and Aaron appear before Pharaoh, however, the term used at this point in the narrative is תַּנִּינִי *tannin*, “crocodile” (7:9–10).³³ Almost all scholars see this discrepancy as a hallmark of the Documentary Hypothesis. The former episode is classified as non-P (for Driver it is J, for Friedman it is E), while the latter is clearly of Priestly origin, as may be seen by the inclusion of Aaron in the narrative (indeed, the staff is Aaron’s staff in chap. 7), along with the involvement of the Egyptian magician-priests.

But is this the only possible solution to the problem of the different reptiles? First, in the desert climate of Mount Horeb (wherever it be located), snakes abound, so the use of שֵׁנָּה *nahaš*, “snake,” in chap. 4 is most apt, while in Pharaoh’s palace on the banks of the Nile (regardless of where the palace was actually located, it could never be far from the Nile), the תַּנִּינִי *tannin*, “crocodile” is more appropriate.³⁴ Second, I consider the change in reptile to reflect an upgrade, for while the transformation of staff-to-snake is impressive, *qal wa-homer* the transformation of staff-to-crocodile! The latter, moreover, accords with the magic performed by the chief lector-priest Webaoner and the caretaker of his gardens in “The Wax Crocodile” story, the

32. See the chapter entitled “Saviors of the Exodus” by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 24–33, 360–65, with additional bibliography cited on pp. 361–62.

33. On the identity of the animal as “crocodile,” see my “Moses as Equal to Pharaoh,” in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. M. Beckman and T. J. Lewis; Brown Judaic Studies 346; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 201–19, esp. p. 209.

34. See already Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 94.

second of the tales appearing in Papyrus Westcar (P. Berlin 3033, ca. 1600 BCE, though the composition is several centuries earlier).³⁵

One of the hallmarks of narrative is the manner in which the plot develops as the text advances. As we saw above, this is true of the plagues account, and of course one easily could multiply such examples in both biblical and other (ancient and modern) literature. The escalation from snake to crocodile between chaps. 4 and 7 is simply one more manifestation of this universal technique. It has naught to do with separate sources.

Interconnections between Exodus 1–2 and Genesis 1–9

As previous scholars have noticed, a number of lexical items in the opening chapters of Exodus match those used in the opening chapters of Genesis. Note the following:

Exod 1:7

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד בְּמֵאֵד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

And the children of Israel were fruitful (פרה *prh*) and they swarmed (שרץ *šrṣ*) and they multiplied (רבה *rbh*) and they were strong, very much so; and the land was filled (מלא *ml'*) with them. (all four verbs occur in Gen 1)³⁶

Exod 2:2

וַתֵּהֵר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֵד בֶּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי טוֹב הוּא

And the woman conceived, and she bore a son, and she saw him, that he was good (כי טוב *ki ṭob*). (expression *ki ṭob* occurs 6x in Gen 1)³⁷

35. Standard editions of the entire Papyrus Westcar are A. M. Blackman and W. V. Davies, *The Story of King Kheops and the Magicians: Transcribed from Papyrus Westcar (Berlin Papyrus 3033)* (Reading: J. V. Books, 1988); and Verena M. Lepper, *Untersuchungen zu pWestcar: Eine philologische und literaturwissenschaftliche (Neu-)Analyse* (Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 70; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008). English translations of the “Wax Crocodile” episode are available in Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of Sinuhe and Other Ancient Egyptian Poems 1940–1640 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107–8; William Kelly Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 15–16; and Stephen Quirke, *Egyptian Literature 1800 BC: Questions and Readings* (London: Golden House, 2004), 78–80 (with transliteration). See also the German translation by Lepper (cited above), 31–34 (with transliteration).

36. In the words of Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Norton, 2004), 308 (note to v. 7), “These terms are all of course pointed verbal allusions to the Creation story.”

37. The parallel is noted by Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken, 1983), 263 (note to v. 2).

Exod 2:3

וַתִּקַּח-לוֹ תֵבַת גֹּמָא

And she took for him a papyrus basket (תֵּבָה *teba*).**Exod 2:5**

וַתִּרְאֵא אֶת-הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף

And she saw the basket (תֵּבָה *teba*) in the midst of the reeds. (*elsewhere*, 26× with the connotation “ark” in Gen 6–9)

These lexical interconnections at the beginning of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus signify a conscious effort to unite the first two books of the Torah. The nexus created, however, does not constitute a simple game of words but, rather, yields a major theological point. The text wishes us to know that the two greatest acts performed by God were the creation of the world (Gen 1–9) and the creation of the people of Israel (Exod 1–2)—and such is accomplished via the use of shared vocabulary.³⁸

Predictably, the Documentary Hypothesis misses most of this, for generally it assigns the passages above to different sources. In truth, this is not the case for the first item above, since both Exod 1:7 and the first creation story are designated P. But problems arise with the second example above: as we saw earlier, Driver assigned Exod 2:2 to E, while Friedman considers this portion of the narrative to be J—though either way, the linkage to כִּי טוֹב, “that it was good,” occurring 6× in Gen 1 (assumed to be P) is lost. The third illustration above works not at all for Driver and only partially for Friedman, since Exod 2:3 and 2:5, containing the word תֵּבָה, “basket” belongs to a non-P source (again, E for Driver, J for Friedman), while the same word occurring 26× in the Flood story of Gen 6–9 with the meaning “ark” is distributed across both J and P, according to the source division.³⁹ A better approach, as indicated above, is to see all of this material as deriving from a single pen.

Interconnections within the Exodus Narrative

In like fashion to the above section, one also finds interconnections within the Exodus narrative itself, once more as part of the plot development. Of all the examples that could be provided, I limit myself to one stellar illustration.

38. See already my article “The Literary Approach to the Bible and Finding a Good Translation,” 184–85.

39. On the unity of the Flood narrative, see Gordon J. Wenham, “The Coherence of the Flood Narrative,” *VT* 28 (1978): 336–48; Gary A. Rendsburg, “The Biblical Flood Story in the Light of the Gilgameš Flood Account,” in *Gilgameš and the World of Assyria: Proceedings of the Conference Held at Mandelbaum House, The University of Sydney, 21–23 July 2004* (ed. J. Azize and N. Weeks; ANES Supplement 21; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 115–27.

Exod 2:23–25 (P)

וַיִּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבָדָה וַיִּזְעְקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעֲתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבָדָה:
 וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אֲבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק
 וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב:
 וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּדַע אֱלֹהִים:

and the children of Israel groaned under the servitude, and they cried-out; and their plea went-up to God, from the servitude.

And God heard their moan; and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

And God saw the children of Israel; and God knew.

Exod 3:6–7 (E/J)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב . . .
 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה רָאֵה רָאֵה רְאִיתִי אֶת־עַנְי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־צַעֲקָתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי
 נַגְשָׁיו כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת־מַכָּאֲבוֹ:

And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

And Yhwh said, “I have indeed seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt; and their cry I have heard, in the face of their oppressors, for I know their sufferings.”

These two passages link two separate scenes within the narrative. At the end of chap. 2, somewhat as a coda to the story of Moses in Midian, we learn that—meanwhile, back at the ranch (as it were)—the children of Israel, still in bondage in Egypt, called out to God. This mention of God, moreover, constitutes his first appearance in the narrative, save for his cameo role in rewarding the midwives for their good deed (1:20–21). The disappearance of God from the narrative in chaps. 1–2 parallels the nadir of Israel’s experience: the people are enslaved in Egypt, and their potential leader, Moses,⁴⁰ is a fugitive from Egyptian law, living in exile in Midian. With the cry to God at the end of chap. 2, the reader can expect Israel’s fortunes to turn; and indeed, this is precisely what transpires at the beginning of chap. 3, as God speaks to Moses for the first time at Mount Horeb.

The key linkages between the two episodes are the verses presented above. They share not only the designation of the God of Israel as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also four verbs: *זַעַק/צַעַק* *zʿq/sʿq*, “cry out”; *שָׁמַע* *šmʿ*, “hear”; *רָאֵה* *rʿh*, “see”; and *יָדַע* *ydʿ*, “know.” This connection was noted already (at least to some extent) by Rashi (1040–1105); and it is

40. The exposed-infant motif in Moses’s birth story (2:1–10) would signal to the ancient readers that the child is destined to become the leader of his people. See the collection of such tales assembled by Donald B. Redford, “The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (cf. Ex. II 1–10),” *Numen* 14 (1967), 209–28. For additional discussion, see my “Moses as Equal to Pharaoh,” 204–8.

recognized by scholars who bring a literary sensitivity to the text, such as Everett Fox and Robert Alter.⁴¹

And yet the Documentary Hypothesis (in our case, according to both Driver and Friedman) is oblivious to all this, for 2:23b–25 is ascribed to P, 3:6 to E, and 3:7 to J. Once more, the holistic approach is to be preferred, especially since the J-E-P dissection removes the theological tenet inherent in the text: when the people cry out to God, the deity responds.

Conclusion

In the preceding sections, we have examined the Exodus narrative through eight different lenses. In each case, I believe that the holistic approach to Exod 1–14 provides for a better understanding of the text than that which emerges from classical source division. The partition of this material into its hypothesized J, E, and P components strips the narrative of its literary structure, belletristic artistry, textual interconnections, and at times its theological messages.⁴²

41. Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 271 (note to v. 7); and Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 319 (note to v. 7).

42. For additional arguments in favor of the literary unity of the Exodus narrative, see Charles D. Isbell, "Exodus 1–2 in the Context of Exodus 1–14: Story Lines and Key Words," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature* (ed. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser; JSOTSup 19; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 37–59; and idem, *The Function of Exodus Motifs in Biblical Narratives: Theological Didactic Drama* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 52; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 26–45. I am grateful to Jesse Long (Lubbock Christian University) for the former reference. In addition, see now Jonathan Grossman, "The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative and the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," *VT* 64 (2014): 588–610, which builds on the work of Scott Noegel (cited above) to argue for yet another overarching literary structure in the plagues account. This article appeared only after the present essay was completed and submitted for publication.