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The book of Exodus contains some of the most important elements of ancient Israel's story that intersect with Christian understandings of the sacraments. They include the natural elements of fire and cloud associated with God's presence, the Passover meal, the rescue through the waters of the Red Sea, the water from the rock in the wilderness, the manna from heaven, the making of a covenant on Mount Sinai, and the contrast of the golden calf versus the tabernacle as the true sign of the visible presence of God's glory.

God's presence first appears to Moses in the form of fire within a continually burning bush that was not extinguished "at the mountain of God" called Horeb as Moses stood "on holy ground" (Exod 3:1-12). God continues to be present in a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night as God led Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness

(Exod 13:21; 14:24; 40:38). God's later appearance on top of Mount Sinai (the alternate name of Mount Horeb) was likewise accompanied by natural elements of fire and smoke that convey power, danger, light, and holiness (Exod 19:18; 24:17; see also Deut 4:12, 15, 24, 33, 36; 5:4, 22-25).

The Passover meal commemorates God's dramatic deliverance of Israelite slaves from bondage in Egypt. The interweaving of the narrative account of the Passover along with instructions for future generations for observing the Passover as an annual festival underscores how future Israelites are to claim the exodus story as the core of their own life story and religious identity. The Passover narrative and instructions appear in the context of the death of all Egypt's first-born sons, which was the last of ten plagues sent by God in order to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go (Exod 12-13). All three Synoptic Gospels portray the Lord's Supper as instituted by Jesus in the context of the celebration of this annual Jewish Passover meal (Matt 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20; see John 1:29, 36).

Many scholars suggest that the festival of Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread were originally two separate festivals that came to be joined together as one in the present biblical text. The pre-biblical Passover festival may have focused on the sacrificial offering and eating of a lamb while the festival of Unleavened Bread placed a spotlight on the offering and eating of bread, with a possible link with the celebration of the spring grain harvest in the land of Canaan. The Unleavened Bread festival is mentioned alone without reference to Passover in Exodus 23:15 and 34:18. The law in Leviticus 23:5-6 commands the celebration of Passover to begin on the fourteenth day of the first month of Abib "at twilight," while the feast of Unleavened Bread is to begin on the fifteenth day of the same month, presumably at sunset and thus overlapping with the beginning of Passover (see Num 28:16-17). The most extensive instructions for the feast of Unleavened Bread are provided in Exodus 12-13. The sections concerning the sacrifice of the lamb for Passover (Exod 12:1-13, 43-49) are distinct from the instructions for the festival of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12:15-20; 13:3-10). This lack of full integration of the festival instructions suggests that originally these were probably separate festivals that came to be spliced together. They clearly were celebrated together by the post-exilic period (see Ezek 45:18-25; Ezra 6:19-22; 2 Chr 35:17) (Wagenaar 2004: 250-268).

A central feature of the combined Passover/Unleavened Bread festival was that only unleavened bread could be eaten during the seven days of the festival (Exod 12:8, 15, 17, 20; 13:7; 23:15; 34:18; Lev 23:6; Num 28:17; Deut 16:3, 8). Nothing with yeast could be consumed. On the first day of the festival, the Israelites were commanded to "remove leaven from your houses" (Exod 12:15). Also on the first day of the festival, the roasted lamb was to be eaten with the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs that symbolized the bitterness of Israel's slavery in Egypt (Exod 12:8; Num 9:11). The consequence for eating anything leavened with yeast during the seven days of the festival was severe; the viola-

tor would "be cut off from Israel" (Exod 12:15). The festival's unleavened bread was a remembrance that the Israelites left Egypt in "great haste" and "could not wait" for the rising of bread dough after the death of the Egyptian first-born and Pharaoh's decree that the Israelite slaves should leave Egypt (Exod 12:39; Deut 16:3). The unleavened bread is also remembered as "a bread of

affliction" (Deut 16:3). Eating the unleavened bread is commanded for "all the days of your life" so that Israelites may remember their departure from Egypt. Eating bread made without yeast, a bread commonly associated with the diet of the poor in many cultures, is intended to stimulate the communal memory of slavery in Egypt and God's rescue from its suffering and oppression.

The feast of Passover is closely interwoven with the tenth plague, God's killing of all the first-born of Egypt, both humans and animals. The roasted lamb at the center of the meal commemorates the blood of a slaughtered lamb with which the Israelite slaves marked the doorposts of their houses. The angel of death who killed the Egyptian first-born "passed over" the Israelite homes smeared with blood so that no Israelite firstborn would die in the plague (Exod 12:3-14). Earlier in Exodus, God had affirmed that Israel was God's "firstborn son" (Exod 4:21-23) whom God would protect when Egypt's firstborn were killed. In the context of the instructions for the Passover, God reminds Moses that all the firstborn among the Israelites are consecrated to God and belong to God, both humans and animals (Exod 13:1-2). While firstborn animals were to be sacrificed as burnt offerings to God in future generations, all human firstborn sons among the Israelites were to be "redeemed" through a payment of money (Exod 13:11-16; see Exod 34:19-20). The individual members of the priestly and landless tribe of the Levites also served as substitutes for the firstborn sons in other Israelite tribes (Num 3:11-13; 8:15-19).

This motif of a deity's right to claim all firstborn of humans or animals seems to reflect an ancient belief in some cultures of the biblical world that the sacrifice of a firstborn son as a burnt offering had special power and gravity. Thus, an enigmatic episode in 1 Kings 3:26-27 reports how the king of Moab was losing in a battle against the Israelite army. The Moabite king then offered his firstborn son as a burnt offering to his deity, and "great wrath came upon" the Israelite army so that it was forced to withdraw and go back home. The association of the Passover, the lamb whose blood saved the Israelites, and God's claim upon all human firstborn of the Israelites provided the seedbed for the intimate connection of the annual Passover meal with the story of Abraham's near-sacrifice or binding of his son Isaac in Genesis 22, a connection that emerged in the literature of Second Temple Judaism as well as later Jewish traditions (Levenson 1993: 176-186).

In Genesis 22, God commands Abraham to offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering at Moriah. Abraham obeys. Just as he raises his hand to slay his son with a knife, the angel of God intervenes and prevents Abraham from killing his son. God provides a ram as a substitute burnt offering for Isaac while God also affirms that Abraham has passed his test, trusting God's promise and obeying God's command. The motif of the beloved or firstborn son, the command to offer the son as a burnt offering to God, the lamb or ram whose blood spares the son from death, and the deliverance from death and oppression are elements common to the Passover story and the near-sacrifice of Isaac.

The connection of the Passover story in Exodus 12-13 with the near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is further deepened by the later biblical text of 2 Chronicles 3:1 that linked the place name "Moriah" (the location of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac—Gen 22:2) with the temple in Jerusalem where Israelites brought their burnt offerings of grain

and animals. Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his own son may be understood as a one-time, unrepeatable act of faith and obedience that earned for the Israelite people a virtually inexhaustible bank account of merit before God. When Israelites in future generations brought their sacrifices of grain and animals to the Jerusalem temple, their sacrifices in effect drew on the merit of Abraham's unrepeatable act of obedience (Childs 1992: 325-336). The willingness of the father, Abraham, to give up his son and thereby accrue inexhaustible merit for future Israelites was apparently reinterpreted in a New Testament text like Romans 8:32 in which the willingness of God the Father to offer up his own Son created an unlimited reward of promise and assurance for believers in Christ: "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else" (Dahl 1974: 146-160)? These associations of the Last Supper, the Passover, temple sacrifices, and Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac provide a rich nexus of associations and meanings that may enhance the New Testament and later Christian interpretations of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

If the death of the firstborn and Passover illuminate aspects of the Lord's Supper, the story of the crossing of the Red Sea (or Reed Sea) provides a fruitful Old Testament resource for the understanding of baptism. Two versions of the story stand side by side, one narrative and one poetic. The prose narrative recounts how God works through the mediation of Moses and a strong east wind to split the waters of the Red Sea into two, creating a pathway of dry land through which the Israelite slaves walk from bondage into freedom. The Egyptian army pursues the Israelites into the sea, God returns the waters, and Pharaoh and his army drown in the sea (Exod 14:21-31). The narrative echoes God's creational work of a divine "wind" sweeping over the waters and separating the waters above from the waters below, thereby creating dry land (Gen 1:2-11). The poetic version in the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 portrays more of a direct battle between God, as a divine warrior and Pharaoh in which Moses and Israel are more passive observers rather than active agents. God uses the evil waters of chaos to drown and defeat the enemy power of Pharaoh (Exod 15:1-11). The earth also participates along with the sea in swallowing up the enemies of God (Exod 15:12). Moreover, the victories of God extend to the conquest of the land of Canaan and the planting of God's "holy abode" where God's sanctuary is established (Exod 15:13-18). The poetry of Exodus 15 moves the exodus beyond the level of a one-time historical encounter between Israel and Egypt to a paradigm of a recurring cosmic battle in which God will be victorious against the powers and enemies, both historical and cosmic, arrayed against God and God's people. Thus, as in the ritual of baptism, the passage through water in Exodus 14-15 is both judgment and deliverance, both death and life, both freedom from bondage to other powers and freedom for obedient service to the one true Ruler who is the LORD, the God of Israel.

Two wilderness texts in Exodus have special associations with the sacraments: God's provision of manna from heaven in Exodus 16:1-36 and the miracle of water from the rock in Exodus 17:1-7. Both of these sustenance stories in the wilderness occur as the freed Israelite slaves begin their journey through the wilderness toward the promised land of Canaan. Hunger and thirst are basic and legitimate causes for the Israelites to

complain to Moses and to God, and God responds positively to the complaints by providing the food and water necessary for their life in the wilderness. In the manna story, the LORD promises, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you" which the people will receive each day in quantities sufficient for their needs for that day, no matter how long or short a time they work (Exod 16:4, 16-21; see Matt 6:25-34; 20:1-16). On the seventh or sabbath day of the week, they are not to go out and work by picking up manna since it is a day of rest (Exod 16:23-30). This story actualizes for the first time the gift of the sabbath day of rest which God first introduced into creation in Genesis 2:1-3. God also instructs future generations of Israelites to keep a portion of the manna in a jar to be placed "before the LORD" and visible during the worship of the community as a kind of public, sacramental reminder of God's gracious provision of the community's basic human needs (Exod 16:33-36), an echo of a petition from the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt 6:11; see John 6:30-51), and an echo of the several feeding stories with sacramental overtones in the Gospels (Matt 14:13-31; 15:32-38; Mark 6:34-44; 8:1-9; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:1-14).

The other sustenance story is more baptismal in its nuances with the miraculous provision of water from the rock. God instructs Moses to strike the rock in the wilderness with his staff, the same staff with which Moses struck the Nile River when it turned to blood and parted the waters of the Red Sea so that Israel could escape to freedom on dry ground (Exod 17:1-7). The apostle Paul alludes to this text with a nod to a baptismal and Christological typology:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10:1-4)

As baptism is the rite of initiation for individuals in the New Testament, Exodus 19:1-24 and 24:1-18 are the narrative bookends of a communal rite of initiation into the covenant between God and God's people Israel on Mount Sinai. This covenant-making ceremony begins with the story of God's gracious deliverance of Israel: "how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt (Exod 19:4). Following from this divine deliverance is Israel's God-given vocation and identity: "you shall be my treasured possession . . . a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6; see 1 Peter 2:9-10). Exodus 24 provides an additional perspective on the covenant-making ceremony. Although Moses is the primary mediator who goes up Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, Moses is joined on Mount Sinai by the high priest Aaron, his sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of the people. They all go part way up the mountain, and remarkably, the text reports, they

went up and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. God did not lay his

hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank. (Exod 24:9-11)

The covenant-making meal of eating and drinking, the "seeing" of God, the beauty associated with the divine, and the participation of priests and elders together provide a rich portrait of covenant-making with sacramental overtones. In other instances in the Old Testament, to "see God" is dangerous and often prohibited (Gen 16:13; 33:20; Judg 6:22-23; 13:22). Along with the leaders of the community, the people participate as well in the covenant ceremony. Moses sets up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel and then supervises the sacrifice of animals as burnt offerings, setting the blood of the sacrifices aside.

Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, "See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." (Exod 24:6-8; see Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Heb 9:20; 12:24)

The covenant-making rituals of Exodus 19 and 24 surround the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exod 21:1-17) and the laws of the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:22-23:33). These covenant obligations flow out of a prior relationship initiated by God. Before any commandments are given, God affirms: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:1). The laws that follow formally instruct the people on how to live more deeply in that already established relationship with God.

The disciples of Jesus swore undying allegiance to Jesus "on the night in which he was betrayed," and yet all his disciples betrayed, denied, or abandoned him on the night of the covenant meal of the Last Supper (Matt 26:21-25, 31-35, 56; Mark 14:19, 29-31, 50; Luke 22:33). Similarly, the Israelites all enthusiastically endorsed their commitment to the covenant and promised to do "all that the LORD has spoken," including the first and most central commandments against worshipping other gods and making no graven images or idols. Yet the Israelites quickly abandoned God and formed an idol of a golden calf which they worshiped, saying, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:4; see 1 Kgs 12:25-33). God was prepared to destroy all the Israelites except for Moses, and yet Moses interceded and persuaded God to forgive them (Exod 32:9-14). Moses angrily broke the two tables of stone containing the words of the covenant written by God as he came down the mountain (Exod 32:15, 19). Moses returned to intercede further with God, and in the end God made a new covenant grounded in God's mercy and forgiveness, symbolized by two new tablets of stone (Exod 34:1-10; see Jer 31:31; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25).

Although the golden calf was condemned and destroyed as an idol, the book of Exodus devotes much attention to the plans and construction for the tabernacle or

movable tent that functions as a visible sign of God's presence in the midst of Israel as they traveled through the wilderness (Exod 25-31, 35-40). Indeed, the climax of the book of Exodus comes in Exodus 40:34 when the divine "cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." This settling of the divine presence upon the tabernacle fulfills God's purpose in delivering Israel out of its slavery in Egypt: "that I might dwell among them" (Exod 29:46).

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