Exodus in the Pentateuch

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1 Introduction

John Durham opens his Exodus commentary with the sentence: “The Book of Exodus is the first book of the Bible.”¹ This is obviously meant to be a provocative statement that tries to lay more emphasis on the significance of the book of Exodus itself than on its placement after the book of Genesis. Indeed, it is striking that the exodus story introduced in the book of Exodus takes up four of the five books of the Pentateuch and that its foremost hero, Moses, even provides the name for the overall narrative in later Jewish and Christian tradition as the “Torah of Moses” or the “Five Books of Moses,” even though these titles also includes the book of Genesis.

In terms of narrative logic, the story that begins in the book of Exodus seems to continue into (at least) the book of Joshua, as the exodus from Egypt finds its logical completion in the eisodos into the promised land as presented in the book of Joshua.² The book of Exodus apparently also includes literary elements that anticipate narrative and theological developments narrated still later in the book of Kings, most notably the episode of the golden calf (Exod

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which alludes to and presuppose the account of Jeroboam’s installation of the sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan with their calves (1 Kgs 12).³

If one were to designate just the narrative covered by the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy, then it would be best called “Moses’ story,” since these books correspond to the life of Moses (except for Exod 1). It is, however, a matter of dispute whether such a story ever existed as an independent literary entity, or only formed an episode in a larger work.⁵

Regarding the prominence of the exodus as a literary motif, it is evident from a wider biblical perspective that it is much more significant and prominent in the Hebrew Bible than the primeval or patriarchal traditions in the book of Genesis. In the narrative books following the Pentateuch, there are many allusions to the exodus (see e.g. Josh 2:8–11; 5:1; 9:9; 24:2–8; Judg 2:1; 2:11; 6:8–9; 3

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