

ALASTAIR J. ROBERTS

- and -

ANDREW WILSON

# ECHOS



# EXODUS

*Tracing Themes*

- of -

*Redemption*

*through Scripture*

“Roberts and Wilson show how the exodus is more than a past event; it is a paradigm that shapes the storyline of the Bible and the life of the believer. The blend of rich biblical theology and beautiful writing will stir the affections of all who long for the Promised Land of the new heaven and new earth.”

**Matthew S. Harmon**, Professor of New Testament Studies,  
Grace College and Theological Seminary

“Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson have written a marvelous book. In 176 packed, lucid pages, they explore the exodus, one of the Bible’s main themes from Genesis to Revelation. The authors say that Scripture is musical, and their book will leave haunting echoes of exodus ringing in your soul. *Echoes of Exodus* won’t just teach you about exodus; it will teach you how to read. In studying it, you will learn to harmonize on the melody of God.”

**Peter Leithart**, President, Theopolis Institute;  
Contributing Editor, *Touchstone* Magazine

“I treasure books that bring the Scriptures to life, such as this one. This is what biblical theology should look like. This work by Roberts and Wilson taught me a great deal about the Bible and gave me a renewed appreciation for the exodus motif throughout God’s Word. Seminary professors, preachers, Bible study leaders, and others are going to love *Echoes of Exodus*.”

**Mark Jones**, Teaching Elder, Faith Vancouver  
Presbyterian Church



# ECHOES OF EXODUS



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*Tracing Themes of Redemption  
through Scripture*

Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson

 **CROSSWAY**<sup>®</sup>  
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*Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture*

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For Derek Rishmawy and Matt Anderson





# Contents

Acknowledgments .....	11
Prelude: Echoes of the Exodus .....	13

## **OVERTURE**

1 A Musical Reading of Scripture .....	21
2 The First Supper (Matthew 26) .....	28

## **FIRST MOVEMENT: OUT OF THE HOUSE OF SLAVES**

3 From the Bulrushes to the Bush (Exodus 1–3) .....	35
4 The Battle of the Gods (Exodus 4–15) .....	41
5 True Freedom (Exodus–Deuteronomy) .....	47
6 Journey's End (Joshua 1–7) .....	53

## **SECOND MOVEMENT: THE EXODUS IN GENESIS**

7 People of Rest (Genesis 6–9) .....	61
8 Russian Dolls (Genesis 10–15) .....	65
9 Just Like Us (Genesis 16–26) .....	70
10 Wrestling with God (Genesis 27–50) .....	75

### **THIRD MOVEMENT: THE REECHOING OF EXODUS**

11	Wings of Refuge (Ruth) .....	83
12	The Capture of God (1 Samuel 1–7) .....	88
13	All about the House (1 Samuel 15–2 Samuel 24) .....	93
14	The End of the Exodus? (1 Kings 6–13) .....	99
15	Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 16–2 Kings 13) .....	104
16	The Outstretched Arm (Isaiah–Malachi) .....	109
17	Purim and Purity (Ezra–Esther) .....	116

### **FOURTH MOVEMENT: THE GREAT DELIVERANCE**

18	The Crescendo (Matthew–John) .....	125
19	The Exodus of Jesus (Matthew–John) .....	131
20	Sinai and Pentecost (Acts) .....	137
21	Paul’s Gospel (Romans–Jude) .....	142
22	The Exodus of Everything (Revelation) .....	149
	Coda: Living the Exodus .....	155
	Notes .....	160
	General Index .....	165
	Scripture Index .....	173

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## Prelude

# Echoes of the Exodus

The exodus is central to the Scriptures, central to the gospel, and central to the Christian life. Whatever book of the Bible you are reading, and whichever Christian practices you are involved in, echoes of the exodus are in there somewhere.

This is not the kind of thing you can establish through logical argument: *A*, therefore *B*, therefore *C*. Stories don't usually work that way. You can't prove logically that *West Side Story* is based on *Romeo and Juliet*. The echoes cannot be proved, any more than you can prove that a joke is funny. Rather, they have to be *heard*.

Our approach in this book starts from there. We hope to convince you that Scripture contains all sorts of connections, riffs, and themes that you may not have noticed, but we hope to do this by showing rather than by telling. Sometimes you may disagree. You may think we're reaching, or you may think we've missed something. In many ways, that doesn't matter. As long as we recognize that *The Lion King* is based on *Hamlet*, we can agree to disagree on whether Nala is an anti-Ophelia, or whether we can see Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the characters of Pumbaa and Timon.

Having said that, we will generally err on the side of hearing those echoes more, rather than less.<sup>1</sup> Partly this is because we think those connections are actually there, both in the events themselves, through the providence of God, and in the ways the biblical writers have told their stories. Partly, though, it is because we can see a number of ways in which a greater appreciation of the unity of Scripture, especially when it comes to the theme of redemption from slavery, can help strengthen the church in the twenty-first century. Four ways in particular spring to mind.

One: much of the contemporary church, especially in evangelical circles, suffers from a rootlessness that makes it easy to lose our bearings, and even our identity. We live in a disoriented and rootless age.<sup>2</sup> Novelty and self-expression are prized above wisdom and experience. Inevitably, this has affected the church, not just in its forms of worship, but in its very sense of identity. In this sort of world, there is no better way of finding our moorings than reading the Old Testament (in particular) as if it were, as Paul puts it, “written for our sake” (1 Cor. 9:10; see also Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11). We view the Scriptures, and the exodus in particular, as not just *their* story, but as *ours*. “Our fathers were all under the cloud,” Paul tells the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:1). They all passed through the sea. They all ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink. And these things happened as examples *for us*, their great-great-etc.-grandchildren (vv. 1–6). We are to read about the exodus like we might read about the D-day landings: as a defining history that explains who we are. The exodus is our family story.

Two: the more we see the connections between the Testaments, the less likely we are to succumb to the idea that the God of the Old Testament is morally inferior to or must be distinguished from the God revealed in Jesus. Few people will explicitly state it like this, but many are eager to put as much distance as possible between, say, the conquest of Canaan and

the person of Jesus, as if the latter could never have approved of, let alone commanded, the former. Others have gone further and argued that God simply never kills anybody for any reason, so every instance of violence in the Bible that implicates God should be seen as (a) incompatible with Jesus, and therefore (b) invented by ancient Israel.<sup>3</sup> Seeing the extent to which the exodus story is echoed throughout Scripture, not least in the ministry and teaching of Jesus, exposes the fragile foundations of all kinds of neo-Marcionism.<sup>4</sup>

Three: our generation is confused as to the nature of true freedom. No matter how often we experience liberation from constraints, limitations, and oppression, we still find ourselves falling into new forms of bondage. We get free from boredom, and fall into slavery to distraction. We pursue liberty from prohibitions, and fall into bondage to addictions. We escape repression, and become enslaved to lust. We are released from isolation, and fall captive to peer pressure and the power of the online mob. We pursue liberty from the constraints upon our natures, and fall into bondage to our untrained passions. We successfully break out of 1984, only to find ourselves in *Brave New World*. Or, in the imagery of *The Hunger Games*, we get free from fences and guns in the districts, only to find ourselves trapped by slavish banality in the Capitol. True freedom is more complicated than it looks.

So, for example, the twenty-first-century church in the West faces two pressing ethical challenges that would seem to pull it in opposite directions. The first is the need for racial reconciliation and justice, which in the wider culture is generally seen as a progressive cause; the second is the need to remain orthodox on sexual ethics, which is typically a conservative concern. When framed in a secular way, these aims look to stand in tension: either you denounce your past prejudices and pursue radical inclusion for everyone, maximizing freedom by removing all constraints and limitations, or you stand firm in the face of



cultural pressure and preserve the traditions of your fathers, restricting people's freedom for some higher cause. When framed by the exodus story, however, these categories disintegrate. Our redemption story is one in which "freedom *from*" is inextricably bound up with "freedom *to*." God's people are exodus people, so we know *both* the pain of oppression on racial grounds in Egypt, *and* the dangers of compromise, idolatry, and immorality in the wilderness. We also know that there is little point in being free *from* serving Pharaoh if we are not also free *to* serve the Lord. So we are not defined by the categories of 1789 or 1968, by progressive and conservative, left and right. We pursue true freedom—whether from Egypt or the golden calf, oppression or immorality—knowing that if the Son sets us free, we will be free indeed (John 8:36).

Four: for a variety of reasons, different sections of the church today have become aligned with particular images, models, or pictures of the atonement, leading to a shrinking of the biblical gospel, as well as a fair bit of disunity and suspicion. (Some say "I am of Christus Victor," some say "I am of reconciliation," some say "I am of penal substitution," and others say, "I am of Christ.") Reactions have bred counterreactions, and the center of our faith has, somewhat tragically, become a source of contention.<sup>5</sup> The exodus story, however, because it is so long and recurs so often, provides a wonderful framework for thinking about how all the different atonement imagery fits together. It is a story of redemption from slavery, involving blood sacrifice, a substitute, liberation, reconciliation with God, a great victory, vindication through faith, union with God, adoption, priesthood, Passover, baptism, kingdom, and probably others—all of which, of course, also take place through the cross—and as such, the exodus story helps us grasp how these many descriptions of what Christ has done for us can all be true, without needing them to be played off against each other.

All of this is to say: we reap all sorts of benefits when we see

the unity of Scripture, particularly when it comes to the exodus.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, most of this book is not about any of those things. In the main, it is a book about the exodus theme in the Bible, written to help people make more sense of Scripture, more sense of the gospel, and more sense of the Christian life. Our hope is that it will help fuel your prayers, your worship, and your joy, and that in seeing the exodus in a new light, you will see the God of the exodus in a new light as well.



# OVERTURE



# 1

## A Musical Reading of Scripture

Scripture is music.

We use musical metaphors all the time when we talk about the Scriptures, without even thinking about it. We might describe the Bible as a *symphony* or a *love song*. We might refer to the opening of Genesis as an *overture* or to Revelation as a *finale*. We might talk about the story being *composed* or perhaps *orchestrated* by God, with *themes* and *rhythms* and *echoes* running through it, all building to a *crescendo*. If we are handling some of the difficult sections, we might say that there is a *clash* here or a *discordant note* there, but that there is always, ultimately, a *harmony* within the Word of God, and therefore that we can expect things to *resolve*. We could describe John as written in a different *key* than the other three Gospels, or Chronicles as a *transposed* version of Kings. We might even identify specific books with particular musical modes or styles: Job is the blues, Ecclesiastes is jazz, some of the psalms are in the minor key, or whatever. Much of our language for Scripture is musical.

That might sound trivial. After all, we use figures of speech all the time, and don't necessarily intend for them to be taken that seriously. But the reality is that metaphors, particularly ones that are applied consistently in a particular context, exercise a powerful influence over the way we conceptualize things, and this influence can be helpful, damaging, or neither. It's worth thinking about that for a moment.

To start with a fairly neutral example: we tend to understand people's theories and arguments in terms of buildings. This idea is *foundational* to my understanding. I *demolished* his case by *destabilizing* his assumptions. I *built* my argument and *supported* it with further examples. I *constructed* a defense for the position; the *structural weakness* of her theory can be seen at this point; their position was *shaky*; my view was *robust*; his argument *collapsed* under cross-examination. This controlling image isn't particularly harmful, and it isn't particularly illuminating, but it constrains our thinking more than we realize (as evidenced by the fact that all of us do it, and very few of us even notice). Metaphors matter.

Consider a different example, where the influence of the controlling metaphor might be more of a problem. Politicians use the language of war in all sorts of nonliteral settings. We have wars on terror, on poverty, on drugs, on obesity, on waste, and apparently on an ever-increasing number of abstract nouns. We must *fight* this, we are going to *defeat* that, the real *battlefield* is here, and so on. The war metaphor is familiar, and so it manages to relieve some of the sense of fear and discomfort we are experiencing (this *menace* is out there, and it is a genuine *threat*, but don't worry everyone, we will *conquer* this *enemy*). It also focuses the mind, implying an immediate and serious threat to our well-being as a society, and therefore the need to make the matter in question a top priority, even if it demands costly commitment and sacrifices. At the same time, the concept of war encourages us to think in very binary terms—good guys and bad

guys, heroes and villains, enemies to be defeated and territory to be defended—which, when oversimplifying complex problems, has backfired in various ways in the war on terror and the war on drugs. It raises the rhetorical stakes and rallies people to a cause, but turns everyone into opponents or allies, when many are neither, or perhaps even both (a point which is made powerfully in movies like Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* and Peter Berg's *The Kingdom*).

But now imagine that instead of employing military metaphors when speaking about a problem like, say, poverty, we employed a fabric metaphor instead. Say we talked about the *frayed edges* of society and recovering the *stitches* we once dropped. Say we lamented the *unraveling* of communities, addressed the *knotty tangles* of social problems, and argued that belonging to *close-knit* families was a crucial *thread* in the *fabric* of society. That metaphor might cause us to think and act rather differently. It would subtly teach us to think of our problems less in terms of opposition to an external enemy and more in terms of our interconnectedness and the importance of maintaining the integrity of society's relationships. It would alert us to the delicate character of social problems and of the need for patience, care, and measured action in addressing them, lest tangles become knots by being pulled too hard, or dropped stitches lead to unraveling by being ignored for too long. On the face of it, the only change would be our choice of metaphor—but the implications could be substantial.

The point is this: metaphors have great power to fashion the way we conceptualize things, even when we don't notice they are doing it. If a controlling metaphor is chosen well, it has the capacity to illuminate new worlds of meaning and help us see all sorts of connections we might otherwise have missed.

So it is with Scripture and music.





A musical approach to Scripture encompasses a number of aspects, each of which can help us see Scripture in a fresh light. One, which we have already mentioned, involves the language of tension and resolution. Sometimes two or more books of the Bible, or even two or more parts of the same book, seem to clash with each other, and no resolution is obvious. Yet as the biblical piece develops, we find new themes being introduced, which bring the various instruments together, rearrange things somewhat, and resolve with a harmony that does justice to all of them. Sometimes the clashes are sustained and deliberate and uncomfortable to listen to, but they point forward to a future moment when things will be brought back together again by the master Composer. Scripture, in that sense, is true like jazz.

Another aspect of the music metaphor is the relationship between melody and harmony. The Bible has a clear storyline, a melody, a tune, and it can be summarized (or sung) by a small child. It also has a range of individual and corporate stories that run together, sometimes taking center stage, sometimes fading into the background, providing harmony and counterpoint, treble and bass, height and depth, in such a way that no single writer (or musician) could possibly represent it all. Like Beethoven's famous "Ode to Joy," the Bible is both memorably simple, even catchy, and incredibly intricate at the same time. Biblical study is about exploring the detail of the harmony—Why is the oboe, or Obadiah, doing *that*, and how does it contribute to the whole piece?—without losing sight of the melody. Biblical meditation is about listening to the music for enjoyment, not mere interest, to the point where we dance to its rhythms, sing its choruses, and whistle its melodies on the bus into work.

A third (and more subtle) aspect is the interplay between rhythm and meter. Meter is the underlying time structure of a piece, whether it is audible or not—one, two, three, four, *one*, two, three, four—and although it may vary within the piece, it provides a grounding in time, a sense of orientation, for

the listener. Rhythm is the structure of the sound you actually hear—boom, ba-*cha*, boom, boom, ba-*cha*—which may involve a number of notes in one beat, or a number of beats without notes. The rhythm rides the meter like a surfer rides a wave, playing, doing its own thing, but always mindful of and constrained by the steady movement underneath.

Scripture works in a similar way. Chronologically speaking, every day is as long as every other day, with the passing of weeks, months, seasons, and years providing a meter for the piece as it unfolds. If we want to, we can form timelines from the Bible, reconstruct histories, and synchronize dates with external sources. But the rhythm of Scripture is not like that. Strong, accented, audible beats dominate the rhythm—Sabbath, Passover, the Day of Atonement, Pentecost, and the like—and they form regular patterns that draw repeated attention to particularly important moments in the story. And because the rhythm is repeated so much, every time we hear it, we are somehow transported back to the first time we heard it and forward to the next. So when Mary approaches the tomb early in the morning of the first day of the week, while it is still dark, we are swept back to the first day of the very first week, while it was still dark, and we anticipate the Word of God shattering the darkness: “Let there be light!” From then on, as the first day of the week becomes the Lord’s Day, we look back to creation and back to Easter, and simultaneously look forward to the day when all darkness will become light, and death will be finally swallowed up in victory. Metrically speaking, all beats are equal. Rhythmically speaking, some beats are more equal than others.

When we bring these three aspects together—tension and resolution, melody and harmony, rhythm and meter—we get a full, rich picture of the connections between the different parts of Scripture. As the Bible commences with its overture, we hear a melody, and a regular rhythm begins. As things develop, various harmonies and counterpoints arise, some of which complement

the melody beautifully, but some of which chafe against it, leaving us listeners to wonder what the Composer is doing. (Often, of course, we cause the dissonance, and he is simply waiting for the right time to heal it.) Then the melody returns, cutting through the cacophony and bringing a temporary sense of resolution. To someone who has never heard the piece before, it could even sound like it has been fully resolved and is about to finish (a new reader of the Bible could easily think the tension is resolved, for instance, upon the entrance into the Promised Land or David's coronation). Yet these temporary resolutions produce tensions of their own, which point forward to more complexities, and beyond them, to further resolutions. Throughout the Bible, as time metronomically marches on, the rhythms of Scripture continue to be accented, with particular days and festivals highlighting rest and freedom, law and atonement. But every bar, every cadence, every pause, heightens the sense that the piece is still incomplete. Eventually, after an uncomfortably long silence, the score builds to a massive crescendo in Christ, as the various themes come together and resolve in a fashion that nobody could have imagined, bringing the audience to its feet. Yet even then, the piece does not end but continues to develop themes and ideas, progressing toward a conclusion, echoing the original melody throughout, and retaining (while modifying) the original rhythms. Only at the finale, when the Christ-crescendo is recapitulated and the instruments are joined by earthly and angelic choirs, do we ultimately see the full scope of the Composer's vision.

As such, a musical reading of Scripture does more justice to the way Scripture actually works than, say, a pictorial reading, or even a dramatic reading. Plays are linear: this happens, then that happens, and although the past obviously shapes the present and future, it never comes back. Pictures are representative: this is a picture, an image, a copy, a shadow, a silhouette of that. Scriptural typology is more like a piece of music: familiar

themes like temple, kingdom, exodus, judgment, and sacrifice keep recurring, but always slightly differently. The judgment of Jerusalem is not just a “picture” or “shadow” of the last day; nor is it simply a dramatic “event” that happens once and then is no more. It is somehow a part of the future judgment, a foretaste of it, and yet at the same time historically distinct from it. The final resolution, when it comes, is both familiar and new at the same time. It is, in that sense, musical.



This all sounds a bit floaty and a bit abstract. In many ways, it is. In fact, it's the sort of approach to Scripture that is far easier to see than to imagine, and far more useful to show than to describe. We need to see this approach in action to fully get our heads around it. So that's what the rest of this book is going to try to do, using perhaps the clearest example of a recurring, time-condensing, rhythmic, melodic theme in the entire Bible—one that illuminates the opening pages of Genesis and the closing pages of Revelation, the whole history of Israel, the Gospels, the Letters, the Christian life, and of course the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The exodus.

# “A marvelous book.”

PETER LEITHART

President, Theopolis Institute; Contributing Editor,  
*Touchstone Magazine*

The exodus—the story of God leading his chosen people out of slavery in Egypt—stands as a pivotal event in the Old Testament. But if you listen closely, you will hear echoes of this story of redemption all throughout God’s Word.

Using music as a metaphor, the authors point us to the recurring theme of the exodus throughout the entire symphony of Scripture, shedding light on the Bible’s unified message of salvation and restoration that is at the heart of God’s plan for the world.

“The blend of rich biblical theology and beautiful writing will stir the affections of all who long for the Promised Land of the new heaven and new earth.”

**Matthew S. Harmon,**  
Professor of New Testament Studies,  
Grace College and Theological Seminary

“This is what biblical theology should look like. Seminary professors, preachers, Bible study leaders, and others are going to love *Echoes of Exodus*.”

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