Introduction

New exodus (frequently NE) studies theorize that just as Yahweh delivered his people from Egypt through the leadership of Moses, he would do so again on a grander scale through his unique Son, Jesus. This focus has resulted in a general acknowledgment among NT scholars of a new exodus event in salvation history based on biblical theologies of various OT and NT books. Moreover, some new exodus advocates have even argued that this event may comprise the *leitmotif* of the New Testament. Rikk E. Watts has made significant contributions to new exodus studies in his work on Mark’s Gospel.

Defining a New Exodus

The exodus is defined from Moses’ account of the deliverance narrative of Israel from Egypt; this paper delineates the exodus as those events that relate to Yahweh bringing his people out of Egypt.

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1 Given its widespread support in NT studies, to argue against the validity of a new exodus event would truly seem to be “to sojourn in the wilderness.” The phrase “salvation history” is used here only in a general sense to describe the ways in which God has manifested his redemptive work in history, especially as seen in Christ’s sacrificial act. Since scholars differ widely on what this might include, I do not use it elsewhere in this paper.

2 Tom Holland has taken this view in his theology of Paul, *Contours of Pauline Theology: A Radical New Survey of the Influences on Paul’s Biblical Writings* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2004). Holland argues that NT theology is essentially Jewish, being grounded in new exodus theology, especially related to the Paschal event. Thus, the new exodus is the central paradigm for understanding Paul’s writings. Holland furthers his new exodus work with his recent commentary on Romans (*Romans: The Divine Marriage: A Biblical Theological Commentary* [Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 2011]).


4 See chapter 4 of this dissertation, 148-57.
But recent scholars do not agree on this definition; it goes without saying, then, that they do not agree on the definition of a new exodus. The new exodus event has been variously construed as “the future deliverance of God’s people,” “the reinstatement of the primal creation,” often expressed in the NT as “the fulfillment of the promises of restoration from captivity as the fulfillment of new creation,”\(^5\) and “the sufferings of the Servant and his fellow exiles” as the basis for “a return to that land of promise.”\(^6\) For most NE scholars, it entails the return from the Babylonian captivity, but because of the exile’s meager response, it is suggested that the fulfillment of the NE occurs later. Although some have suggested other possible fulfillments in Isaiah’s prophecy, nearly all agree that the NE is completed in Christ through his death and his resurrection. Reflecting on Hebrews 3:1-6, Enns describes the NE: “It is through Christ (the new Moses) that we the church (the new Israel) are delivered from enslavement (to the present world order, characterized by sin, death, and eternal separation from God) and given entrance to heaven (the new promised land).”\(^7\)

- Rikki Watts describes the transformation of the exodus event:
  “The original exodus pattern—deliverance from Egypt, journey through the desert, and arrival at the promised land—is transformed into the hope of a grander new exodus: deliverance of the exiles from the power of Babylon and its idols, Yahweh’s leading of and provision for his blind people along the “way,” and his arrival and enthronement in a gloriously restored Zion.”\(^8\)

- Watts’ exodus scheme consists of three elements: deliverance, journey, and arrival. According to Watts, the INE does not find fulfillment in the return of the exiles from Babylon. Watts argues that because of Israel’s inadequate response to Yahweh, it was delayed. The arrival of Jesus signals its fulfillment as he executes the role of the Isaianic deliverer.

Old Testament in the New Testament

For good reason, the way in which the New Testament refers to the Old Testament continues to be one of the most important subjects in New Testament studies. Evans suggests that apart from the gospel itself, no other factor makes a more significant contribution to the content of the NT documents.\(^9\) Through its quotations and allusions to OT texts, the New Testament authors understood the mission of Jesus, the basis for salvation, the meaning of discipleship, the future of Israel, and a host of other doctrines in terms of the OT and of fulfillment. In some of the most tightly argued doctrinal passages in the NT such as Romans 3 and Hebrews 1, Old Testament

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\(^8\) “Mark,” 114.

citations abound. It should be no surprise to the reader that nearly every book of the NT canon quotes or alludes to the OT in some way.10

Likewise, Mark cites the OT frequently, developing his Gospel’s theology from these earlier writings.11 Since Mark 1:2-3 records his only editorial citation, NT scholars have sought to explain how these verses may have programmatic importance in relation to Mark’s message. This has resulted in readings of this Gospel that emphasize the book of Exodus,12 the Jewish passover,13 the “way of the Lord” motif,14 the “desert” motif,15 Isaiah,16 Malachi’s threat of judgment,17 and other themes.18 In summary, these scholars all propose some type of NE event for Mark’s gospel.

Isaiah and the New Exodus

James Muilenburg argues that “the conception of the New Exodus (NE) is the most profound and most prominent of the motifs in the tradition which SI employs to portray the eschatological finale.”19 Hugenberger raves that the second exodus theme is “almost omnipresent” in SI. He further posits, “Although Isaiah 40-55 is extraordinarily rich in its complexity and multifaceted

10 Donald Hagner states, “There are, in fact, somewhere between two and three hundred actual quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Beyond this, of course, there is a great amount of allusive material, some of which is deliberate, and some of which is unconscious, though nonetheless real” (“The Old Testament in the New Testament,” in Interpreting the Word of God: Festschrift in Honor of Steven Barmabas, edited by Samuel J. Schultz and Morris A. Inch [Chicago: Moody, 1976], 78). The last part of Hagner’s statement reveals the fact that there is a category problem in OT/NT studies. How does one know when one encounters an “unconscious” allusion?

11 Craig Evans remarks, “Not only does the Markan evangelist make use of all parts of Scripture and all major text types; the evangelist also incorporates quotations of or allusions to Scripture at key points in his narrative” (“The Beginning of the Good News in the Gospel of Mark,” in Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament, ed. Stanley E. Porter [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006], 85).


17 E.g., Watts, Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark.


imagery, it is widely recognized that the controlling and sustained theme of these chapters is that of a Second Exodus.” Buchanan asserts that new exodus typology in SI is “obvious, even to a casual reader.” Westermann quips, “The place which Deutero-Isaiah gives to the Exodus is so conspicuous that all the other events in Israel’s history recede into the background. An arch which spans the nation’s entire history has as its one pillar the release from Egypt and as its other the new, imminent release from Babylon.”

Features of a New Exodus in Isaiah:

- First, this new exodus event includes a wilderness that separates the people of Israel from the promised land; therefore, it needs to be prepared in some way for Yahweh’s intervention (40:3-5).

- Following this preparation, God comes and leads his people like a flock (40:9-11). Although some may grow weary along the way, Yahweh strengthens them, assuring them of safe arrival (40:30-31).

- “Blindness” hinders the exiles from the full realization of these promises, but Yahweh leads them anyway, making the pathway smooth (42:16).

- Even though the people of Israel go through fire and water, Yahweh delivers them (43:2, 16). He provides both food and water along the way (48:20, 21; 49:8-12), and he goes before and behind them as in the days of old (52:11-12). Surely his people would go out of Babylon with joy (55:12-13).

Most NE paradigms for Isaiah include a literal return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. Cyrus in some manner initiates this new exodus by signaling the release of the Jews to their homeland. Although some doubt among scholars may exist over a literal desert that separates Babylon from Jerusalem or over the existence of a physical road called the “way of the Lord,” it is more certain that Yahweh is the one who is returning to Zion.

Modern scholars often consider Cyrus to be the agent of the new exodus, but the Servant of the Lord ultimately accomplishes the work of deliverance. In his study on the Fourth Servant Song (52:13-53:12), Anthony Ceresko draws a connection between the suffering of the Servant prior

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24 Oswalt suggests that the least likely theory on the desert is that Yahweh brought the exiles through the desert as they made their way from Babylon to Jerusalem. The geography of the region entails walking around the desert, not through it. Oswalt favors the desert referring to the Sinai tradition, with Yahweh figuratively coming to Jerusalem from his dwelling there (The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986], 52).
to the new exodus and the suffering of Israel in Egypt prior to its original deliverance. By a similar pattern, Israel’s suffering under the control of a pagan government would precede its exile from Babylon.  

An additional feature of some NE studies is the element of disappointment that occurs as a result of the poor response of the Babylonian exiles to return to the land along with an unwillingness to trust Cyrus as Yahweh’s anointed servant. This disappointment in turn causes a postponement of God’s full NE program, as he is obliged to reject the religious leaders of Israel who fail to trust his wisdom and embrace his faithful servants. Ultimately, the Lord creates a new heaven and a new earth in fulfillment of his covenantal promises. But as discussed elsewhere, no explicit statements occur in Isaiah that indicate that a new exodus would take place. Isaiah prophesies the judgment of the nations, the return of the exiles, the establishment of the kingdom and he promises the creation of the new heavens and the new earth, but he does not specifically describe any of these events as an exodus, let alone a new exodus. Instead, NE scholars must build the case for a new exodus on motifs/terms such as desert, water, warrior, journey, and shepherd.

The New Exodus and Mark

Watts argues for an Isaianic new exodus in Mark’s Gospel that incorporates Malachi’s “threat motif.” Most importantly, according to Watts, the editorial composite citation in Mark 1:2-3 in this Gospel’s prologue suggests that the writing is to be understood in terms of the announcement of an Isaianic new exodus. In addition, he suggests that Mark cites Malachi to introduce a “threat motif” into the narrative. According to Watts, if the religious leaders of Jesus’ day refuse to accept the announcement of the Isaianic new exodus, then Yahweh will come and curse the temple.

25 Ceresko, “Rhetorical Strategy,” 43. Ceresko argues that although the Fourth Servant Song does not contain any echoes of the exodus, key parallels exist with the suffering of the Hebrews prior to their deliverance from Egypt. Ceresko identifies lexical and thematic exodus imagery in 52:4-5 (48-50). But what is more interesting is the concentric arrangement of 52:13-53:12. In this arrangement of the Song, the central element is Isa 53:5cd. The text is arranged in five sections: (1) 52:13-15; (2) 53:1-3; (3) 53:4-6; (4) 53:7-9; (5) 53:10-12. Therefore, if the center element is accorded prominence, then the center of 53:4-6 is 53:5cd: “Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.” Ceresko remarks that this is all built on a larger concentric pattern of exaltation (52:13-14 and 53:10-12) framing a humiliation passage (53:1-9). Ceresko notes that Isaiah uses eleven words in both the humiliation and in the exaltation passages.53:5cd is situated in the center of the humiliation section (51-52). Therefore, one can understand the suffering of the Servant in the following concepts: “He himself endures the imprisonment-exile of an Egypt-Babylon” (ibid., 53).


27 Lund accuses new exodus scholars of this fallacy: “The vast majority of commentaries/studies on Isaiah 40-55 have assumed that a ‘second Exodus’ is a central theme (or the central theme) in Isaiah 40-55, and have undertaken exegesis of relevant passages on this basis” (Way Metaphors, 4).
• Watts, however, overstates the case for a promised new exodus event in Isaiah 40-55. Instead, Isaiah predicts the complete restoration of Israel, with the deliverance of his people from the Babylonian captivity as part of this restoration, frequently described as exodus-like events. Even if a second exodus event is acknowledged in Isaiah, the only event that might appropriately approximate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt is the miraculous return of the Jews to their land in the eschaton.

• Watts’ theory is weakened by the lack of reference with regards to exodus imagery to one singular event in Isaiah. Since at least four events are said to be exodus-like in Isaiah, the concept of the new exodus is difficult to sustain. Likewise, texts that supposedly provide exegetical support for a second exodus may be explained more consistently in different categories of fulfillment (Isa 11:11; cf. 43:19). For example, Isaiah compares the first restoration of the exiles from Babylon to his more extensive restoration of the Jews in the eschaton (11:11). It is not his intent to compare a second exodus to the first one.

• When Isaiah employs exodus imagery, he challenges Israel to trust the God who delivered his people from Egypt to do this new thing that he promises. Frequently, this refers to the eschatological restoration of Israel. The nation’s ultimate hope is the establishment of Yahweh’s kingdom on earth. Thus, the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are fulfilled for the Jews as Jesus rules as King from his throne in Jerusalem, and all nations come to him. But this is not Watts’ new exodus fulfillment. His INE program entails the leading out of a new people of God; membership is no longer to be limited to Israel alone, but all are to be accepted based on individual acceptance of the message. Although he does not directly state this, the new exodus of Isaiah results in the creation of the church. The geopolitical kingdom as it pertains to Israel’s future is afforded little attention in Watts’ thesis. Therefore, since Watts’ new exodus program results in the church replacing Israel, one could only conclude that it amounts to an amillennial approach to human history.

• Likewise, Malachi’s message is ultimately hopeful, although somber in respect to Israel’s failure to honor Yahweh through faith and obedience. In response, Yahweh promises to send a messenger to prepare the way for his return. The appearance of the messenger of the covenant will entail judgment, but also full blessing, as is best seen in Mal 3:12: “Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.” Watts’ theory of “delay” in Malachi fails to convince, as any delay that may be seen in 2:17 has to do with Israel’s faulty perception of Yahweh’s delay. Moreover, this delay concept lacks exegetical support in both Isaiah 40-55 and 56-66. Only a tripartite theory of authorship could allow for this historical construct.

• Mark cites both Mal 3:1 and Isa 40:3 for three reasons. (1) First, these texts function to introduce the one who prepares the way for the Lord. Mark deems the “beginning of the gospel” as the preparing ministry of
John the Baptist in the wilderness, a feature that seems to be consistent with other references to John in the NT.

(2) Second, Mark cites these references to announce the event of the potential coming of the kingdom. The “gospel” in Mark’s prologue is Isaiah’s “gospel,” the good news of the kingdom of God.

(3) Third, the citation explains that this good news begins with a messenger, and it entails preparing actions, the repentance and faith described in 1:4-8.

**Conclusion**

We may confirm that Mark observes the context of both texts in his citation. Both Isa 40:3 and Mal 3:1 predict the coming of a messenger who will prepare the people for the kingdom that had been promised in the prophets, the full restoration of Israel. The good news of both John and Jesus was the good news of the kingdom. This is confirmed in Luke, where he conflates these two verses in an abbreviated version in Zechariah’s song (1:76), a poem with explicit references to the potential fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. In other NT references where these verses are quoted, the writer cites them to identify John as the preparing messenger. If they possess iconic power as Watts suggests, it is to present John as the one who helps Israel to prepare for the kingdom.

Watts is correct in observing that the source of εὐαγγέλιον in Mark 1:14-15 is Isaiah, given the significance of this term for the restoration of Israel, especially as expressed in Isa 40:9. This term, expressed in its verb form, εὐαγγέλιζω, appears six times in Isaiah, in each case to describe the good news of Israel’s restoration.