

# Ministry in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) according to Exodus

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**Dates:**  
Received: 14 May 2014  
Accepted: 10 Aug. 2014  
Published: 29 Apr. 2015

**How to cite this article:**  
Breed, G., 2015, 'Ministry in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) according to Exodus', *In die Skriflig* 49(3), Art. #1842, 9 pages. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i3.1842>

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This article describes ministry in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) as revealed in the Book of Exodus. At the outset, the structure of the Book of Exodus is analysed and the relevant results are given. Then a study is made of what it means, according to Exodus, to be in the presence of God. An effort is also made to describe the service of the people of God in light of the study of *coram Deo*. The results of the investigation are continuously applied to the practical work of the congregation. The article concludes that the ministry can be largely enriched when the congregation are purposefully guided to come together, serve and live consciously in the presence of God.

**Bediening in die teenwoordigheid van God (*coram Deo*) volgens Eksodus.** Hierdie artikel beskryf die lewe voor die aangesig van God (*coram Deo*) soos dit in die Eksodusboek geopenbaar is. Aanvanklik word die struktuur van die Eksodusboek ontleed en die tersaaklike resultate weergegee. Daarna word 'n studie gemaak van wat dit volgens Eksodus beteken om voor die aangesig van God te wees. Daar word ook gepoog om die dienswerk van God se volk te beskryf in die lig van die studie oor *coram Deo*. Die resultate van die ondersoek word deurlopend toegepas op die praktiese dienswerk van die gemeente. Die artikel kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die bediening grootliks verryk kan word wanneer die gemeente doelbewus begelei en toegerus word om bewustelik voor die aangesig van God saam te kom, te dien en te leef.

## Introduction

DeGroat (2009:186–187) shows that the Exodus motif is repeatedly used throughout the Old and the New Testament, and that it has a special significance for the pastoral ministry of the congregation. With reference to this viewpoint, this article will investigate the ministry in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) as it is revealed in Exodus. The significance of the repeated demand of God that Pharaoh must allow his people to go so that they can serve him will also be examined. The findings of the investigation are continuously applied to the ministry of the congregation.

Firstly, the structure of the book is investigated and then a few facets of *coram Deo* are discussed.

## Structure of the Book of Exodus

Please note that the discussion of the composition of the text from different traditions and the historical truth of the events that are described in Exodus fall outside the scope of this article.<sup>1</sup>

Not all researchers discover a structure of unity in the Book of Exodus. The author of this article finds Motyer's analysis (2005:23–26) of the book's structure logical and true to the text, and that it agrees with the findings of other researchers, as will be indicated. He suggests the following two structures according to which the contents of the book can be arranged:

- Part 1 Israel in Egypt: The Saviour (Ex 1:1–13:16)
- The Lord's hidden providence (Ex 1:1–2:22)
  - Yahweh revealed (Ex 2:22–6:13)
  - The saving Lord (Ex 6:14–13:16)

- Part 2 Israel at Sinai: The Companion (Ex 13:17–24:11)
- The Lord's public providence (Ex 13:17–17:16)
  - Yahweh revealed (Ex 18:1–23:33)
  - The covenant Lord (Ex 24:1–11)

1. The author of this article's point of departure is God's divine inspiration of the Scripture, which includes Exodus, whatever the path of the manuscript's origin might be. See Bosman (2004) for the status of research connected to the manuscript' origin. See Patterson and Travers (2004:n. 1) for literature on the historical truth of the Exodus events. See Andinach (2013) for the place of the book Exodus in the larger whole of Genesis to Deuteronomy. See Houtman (1993:1–218) for a discussion of several aspects of the book Exodus, amongst others, words that are regularly found and the place of Exodus in the Bible.

Part 3 Israel around the tabernacle: The Indweller (Ex 24:12–40:38)

- a. The Lord's provision (Ex 24:12–31:18)
- b. Yahweh revealed (Ex 32:1–34:35)
- c. The indwelling Lord (Ex 35:1–40:38)

When this structure is further analysed, it is clear that God's ordaining and providence (a, a, a) is an important motif in the book. In this ordaining and providence, God reveals himself to his people and to the world (b, b, b). Those who accept and believe this revelation enter into a special relationship with God as their Saviour, their God (according to the covenant), and as the God that dwells amongst them (c, c, c).

However, Motyer (2005:25, 26) also discovers a chiasmic construction in the structure of the book. The chiasmic construction (Figure 1) supplies information that is important for the topic of this article.

Right through Exodus the theme of service is found. A<sup>1</sup> describes the forced service to the destructive and enslaving power in the apparent absence of God (cf. Fretheim 1991:26–29). A<sup>2</sup> indicates the voluntary service (Ex 35:5) in the presence of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Ex 35:31). A<sup>1,2</sup> therefore describes two extreme points of service, whilst the theme of service is also found throughout the other chapters as will be discussed later in the article.

B<sup>1</sup> describes God's salvation, which he brought about as symbolised by the celebration of the Passover and, in particular, the blood of the lamb on the doorposts. The emphasis falls on the powerlessness of the human being to bring about salvation and on the grace God granted his chosen people or first-born son. B<sup>2</sup> describes Israel's effort to save and protect themselves and their disowning God as their only Saviour when they designed a god for themselves 'who will go before us' (Ex 32:1).

C<sup>1,2</sup> describes the relationship into which God entered with his people by accompanying them on their way, leading them and going with them. However, there was more as the tabernacle became the symbol of the indwelling of God amongst his people. God's presence is also seen in Moses' face that shone every time after he had met God.

D relates the confirmation of the relationship between God and his people – God, who had led them out of the land of slavery. He gave them regulations on how they had to live in this relationship with him so that the deliverance that he had brought about might become part of their entire lives, that is

A <sup>1</sup>	Building for Pharaoh (1-5)
B <sup>1</sup>	The Lamb of God (6-12)
C <sup>1</sup>	The companion God (13-18)
D	The grace of God and the law of God (18-24)
C <sup>2</sup>	The indwelling God (25-31)
B <sup>2</sup>	The Golden calf (32-34)
A <sup>2</sup>	Building for God (35-40)

FIGURE 1: Motyer's chiasmic construction.

how they had to live as saved people in his presence (Levy 2005:55).

Kushner (2006:23) says in this regard that the journey from Egypt to Canaan could have been relatively short, '[b]ut the evolution of a people from the mind-set of slavery to being comfortable with the obligations and uncertainties of freedom would take much longer'.

It is clear how all of this revelation about God was fulfilled in Jesus Christ as Saviour and as Immanuel. He fulfilled the law and he is the way, the truth and the life. He sent his Spirit to make the freedom he paid for, part of their lives.

The analysis of the Book of Exodus by Kangas (1999:15) concurs with these two structures.<sup>2</sup> He says the core aspects addressed in Exodus are: 'salvation, provision, revelation and building'. In Exodus, fear also plays an important role. There is tension between fear of Pharaoh and the fear of the Lord (Ex 14:13). The hardness of the hearts of Pharaoh and his councillors is directly linked to the fact that they did not fear the Lord (Ex 9:30), because they did not know him (see Davies 1962:875; Bosman 2004:10). Knowledge of the Lord brought fear of the Lord in the hearts of people and fearless action against the enemies of the Lord (Ex 1:17). People who have a heart that is lifted up to the Lord, who live in fear of the Lord, live in the presence of God without fear of people, circumstances and the future (Ex 20:20; Brueggemann 2011:294), because they are certain of the blessing of the Lord (Ex 20:24) and the Lord's presence (Ex 40:34–38).

Motyer (2005:325–326) points out that the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25:1–8) and its completion (Ex 40:1–38) form an 'inclusio'. Within the range of these chapters, God realised his purpose to dwell amongst his people. God revealed himself to his people in his glory, and his people served him in obedience by following him wherever he led them (Ex 40:36–38). Waltke (2007:347) says that Exodus can be divided into two main sections, namely chapters 1–15, which describe the deliverance of Israel, and chapters 16–40, which describe how Israel, as a people, lived before God. This structure can be found back in the structure of the letter to the Ephesians where God's plan for the salvation of his people is described in chapters 1–3 and the life as a freed people in chapters 4–6 (Breed 2014:1–9).

From the discussion of the structure, it is clear that Exodus presents suitable material to research both the service of God's people and a life in the presence of God. The material to follow will shed even more light on the wealth of God's revelation on this topic.<sup>3</sup>

Subsequently, the life in the presence of God and in awareness of him (*coram Deo*) will be examined.

2. See also Nysse (2013), who finds that Exodus 2:23–25 determines the structure of the book.

3. Together with Ferris (1975:191) it may be accepted that Exodus was compiled as a didactic document, and therefore that it serves its author's purpose of teaching by its contents and structure.

## Coram Deo

In this article, the concept of *coram Deo* is used to indicate a life or moments in one's life, that are consciously lived in the presence of the Triune God (see also Snyman 1997:375).

*Coram Deo* goes hand in hand with *sursum corda*, which means to lift your heart up to God and to come consciously into his presence in your thoughts. Living in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) therefore requires that the human being would continuously lift his heart up to God (*sursum corda*). Continuous and sincere *sursum corda* leads to, and is, a definite prerequisite for *coram Deo*.

'Heart' in this article means the human being in his<sup>4</sup> logic, his emotion and commitment.

The Book of Exodus starts with the apparent absence of God and ends with the glorious presence of God amongst Israel with the cloud and the pillar of fire, which determined when Israel would set out and when they would come to a halt (Ex 40; Motyer 2005:325, 325). This summary places the full contents of the book in the tension between the absence and the presence of God. The Book of Exodus may therefore be regarded as material that reveals excellently what it means to live in the presence of God. According to Exodus, the presence of God can be studied from several angles. Bosman (2004:3) lists different words that are used in Exodus to indicate God's presence and briefly discusses the meaning of each word with regard to the topic. He (Bosman 2004:3, 4) also discusses 10 other researchers' approach to the presence of God in Exodus as well as the words *the fear of the Lord* as an indication of the presence of God in Exodus. Amongst all these contributions, this article wants to make a unique contribution to the discussion by investigating the following facets of a life in the presence of God as revealed in Exodus:

- *Coram Deo* when God is invisible, apparently absent.
- *Coram Deo* when God undeniably reveals himself.
- *Coram Deo* at the command of God.
- *Coram Deo* in the joy of God's victory, which sets his people free.

### Coram Deo when God is invisible, apparently absent

In Exodus 1 and 2, the life in the presence of God is described mainly according to the actions of human beings. In Exodus 1:7, when it is said the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied, God is implicitly mentioned. God indeed promised Jacob that his descendants would multiply (Gn 26:24; Andinach 2013:144–146). The command of the king to kill the infant sons of the Hebrews causes the people of Israel the same pain that human trafficking<sup>5</sup> causes people today. In Exodus 1:17, it is mentioned, however, that the midwives feared God and therefore they spared the children despite Pharaoh's command to kill them. In Exodus 1:20–21 it is written that

God blessed the midwives and gave them families, because they feared him. Amram and Jochebed's deed to give up their child in faith served as the starting point of the eventual deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Although the events described in Exodus 2 are interpreted in Hebrews 11 from the viewpoint of the actions of faith (*coram Deo*) of Moses' parents and of Moses himself, it is not said that they could experience the presence of God visually (Dozeman 2009:94). Exodus 2 appears to be a few brush strokes with which the author captures the far-reaching events over several years. It was a time of hardship, pain and misery, which could easily have ended in hopelessness.<sup>6</sup> Cilliers (2010:38) says that times like these unmask the human. It is precisely what happened in the lives of Israel and Pharaoh. What was present in the hearts of the midwives became clear in their actions. The same is true of the cruel heart of Pharaoh, but also of the merciful heart of his daughter: Pharaoh ordered the children to be killed, but the princess showed sympathy to the baby Moses and adopted him (Dozeman 2009:69–73).

In the last verses (Ex 2:24–25) of the chapter, we hear the voice of the author of Exodus.<sup>7</sup> He indicates God's involvement, his presence in all of the events. God listened, he thought of his covenant, he saw Israel and he knew them. It seems possible that verse 25 refers back to God's repeated judging and approval of his creative work (Eslinger 1991:53, n. 1; Gn 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25, 31). In Genesis 1, it is also said that God saw and judged his work. If this reference is accepted, Israel is depicted as God's creation. This may also be done based on the genealogy of people descending from Jacob and on the fruitfulness and multiplication of Israel as the execution of the command to Adam and Eve, according to Genesis 1:28. In contrast to his judgement of his creation in Genesis, God looked on the Israelites and found what he saw not good, but he knew them. What this 'knew' means, becomes clear later when God spoke to Moses about his plans for his people (Ex 3:7): 'The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering".'

Exodus 1 and 2 describe people who lived and acted because of their awareness that God heard, saw, knew and was involved with his people on the grounds of his covenant.

Because they knew his very nature, they feared him. Because they trusted that he would bless them, though they were seeing nothing of his blessings in their harsh reality, they acted the way they did. Thus, they served God, and with their lives *coram Deo*, they made God visible even though he was not distinguishable by anything else. Those people did not get an audible, visible assurance that God heard and saw and understood what they were enduring. Yet, they lived in the faith that it was indeed true (Heb 11). Many years would

4. When the male form is used in this article, the female form is also implicated.

5. Parts of this article were delivered as a paper at a seminar on human trafficking.

6. See Gross (2010), who points out indications of depersonalisation in the text of Exodus 1 and 2. He shows that when the human being is robbed of his identity by oppression, he nevertheless regains his identity in interpersonal relations. See also Peels (2003:27–34) about God hiding himself according to the Old Testament.

7. For a discussion of the role of the author or narrator in Exodus, see Eslinger (1991).

pass after the events described in Exodus 1 and 2 before God would make his presence clear in words and deeds.

It is as if the author is hastening through those times, but he describes an important core part of *coram Deo* in these chapters. God is sometimes invisibly, inaudibly present. At such times, his presence becomes manifest in people's thoughts (faith), which flows over into deeds that bears witness to the certainty that God sees and hears and understands (see also Cilliers 2010:36, 37). The opposite will also be described later in Exodus when the Israelites made a calf to worship in trying to make their god visually present.<sup>8</sup>

Right through the Bible, times of the apparent absence of God are described. Whilst his men were starting to scatter, Saul had to wait for Samuel before the burnt offering could be offered (1 Sm 13). The disciples had to wait during the time between Gethsemane and the appearance of Jesus to his disciples. The entire period between the ascension of Jesus and his second coming is a time during which the people of God have to live *coram Deo* in their hearts and deeds, without necessarily having any visual proof of his presence (2 Th 2; Heb 12). The faith of God's people that he sees and hears and knows is tested by the pain they experience, for instance, the pain in becoming aware of the incomprehensible misery caused by human trafficking, and on which they themselves are looking on powerless in many ways. In Jesus Christ we see the ultimate proof that God knows man's deepest need, and that he acted decisively to free them.

However, there is also another important insight that must be extracted from these chapters. Brueggemann (2011:38–54) says Pharaoh's government system of total control of people's lives and the force on which the system was built, describes the paradigm of all oppressive systems. An inherent feature of this system is fear – the fear of the rulers (e.g. Pharaoh) that they will lose their control and the fear of punishment of those that have been enslaved by the system and sell their service for relative security (Brueggemann 2011:55–58). Such systems are repeatedly established at different places over the ages, and have to be maintained by laws that must be supported by more laws (Ex 1:22). Such systems abuse people as pawns and objects. The ruler and those who are under the rule are frequently deceived to fall into narrowed system thinking – they are not able to think outside the narrowness of this tyrannical system instituted by people.<sup>9</sup>

In Exodus 1 and 2, the midwives, Amram, Jochebed and Miriam are described as people that escaped the spiritual slavery. In those times, the Spirit testified in their hearts that God did indeed see and hear and knew everyone that was involved. From that knowledge, they did everything

8.Years later, Jesus would say, according to Matthew 16:4 (NIV), that a 'wicked and adulterous generation' looks for a sign, and according to John 20:29 (NIV): '[B]lessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

9.Here one can also think of dictators like Nebuchadnezzar, the Pharisees and the Scribes in the time of Jesus, Hitler and every nation that has allowed slavery or the oppression of others. For years and decades, system thinking may allow that injustice is silently condoned. The control that a person gains over others in a marriage, family or work situation by manipulation or the abuse of power, clearly also falls into this category (see Muderhwa 2012).

they could do. They could challenge the system because of the hope that lived in them, and they could dare to disregard the king's command though they were not sure at all what would be waiting on them because of their actions. However, they acted in trust, hope and faith that God was present, and that he would act and destroy the oppressive system. They lived in the expectation that he, the Creator of heaven and earth, would create a new far beyond what the human being could pray or think. Therefore, they could rise above the anxiety-inducing and oppressive system thinking and could see or merely expect new and fresh possibilities.

Throughout the Old and the New Testament, God sent his servants to apply his wisdom once again to systems that were caught up in corruption or negligence (see the prophets, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Jesus in his association with the Pharisees and Scribes, the apostles and Stephen). Because those servants lived *coram Deo*, the Spirit led them to put to practice new thinking, judgement, criticism, admonition and encouragement. Serving God thus means to live in God's presence in such a way that, being free from the circumstances, you can be led by the Spirit to apply God's will and wisdom innovatively to a specific situation.

#### Significance for the ministry in the congregation

The congregation that wants to take to heart the revelation of *coram Deo* in Exodus ought to consider the following:

- Everyone in the congregation should have certainty of the love of God in Jesus Christ and that nothing can separate them from this love. In all teaching and pastoral work, people must be lead to this certainty despite the brokenness and pain in their lives.
- Make sure that the style of the ministry is not built on the principles of totalitarian oppressive system thinking, whether it is consciously or unconsciously:
  1. The way in which the imperative and the indicative in the preaching and pastorate are transmitted will play an important role in the ministry.
  2. The way in which someone is approached to perform a certain ministry or service in the congregation will be determined by the *coram Deo* style of the ministry.
  3. The way in which someone that has fallen into sin is ministered will differ radically in the approach of the oppressive system thinking and in the approach of a ministry in which the fallen sinner is brought *coram Deo*.
  4. With reference to the above examples congregants are guided to stand *coram Deo* and to respond to the Word – a calling or admonition out of their love for, fear of, and trust in God, or is subtle force exerted by cultivating feelings of guilt or by creating fear of punishment or rejection?
- Establish a culture of boldness in the congregation, also amongst young people, to ask penetrating questions. This is done because of the conviction that everyone is accountable to God.

- Encourage congregants to think in a new way and to ask what opportunities they may have to testify to the living God, who hears and sees and knows every situation, and further, to ask where the Holy Spirit wishes to use their gifts.
- Equip the congregants to point out, without fear, but with love, any wrongdoing in the congregation and in the society, and to refuse to condone injustices.
- Equip the members to be on their guard against prosperity religion and a consumer mentality in the congregation. Also equip them to guide members to accept, with faith and trust in the Lord, that he will sometimes be apparently absent, even amidst the greatest misery. The members must be equipped to search for peace in their struggle when God is silent, knowing that God is sovereign and would not remain silent forever. This is done in the knowledge that he is present, living and active (see Peels 2003:35, 36).

All of the above-mentioned recommendations are built on the purposeful guidance of the congregation to live deliberately in the presence of God – not only during the worship services, but also during every day of the week. Together with these guidelines, the trusting fear of the Lord must capture the hearts of members by the way in which the guidance is conducted.

### **Coram Deo when God is present – Holy, visible, acting**

Right throughout Exodus, God reveals his holiness, his power, his glory and his grace. From the burning bush, through the plagues and the parting of the sea, his revelation on the mountain, his care of Israel by providing them with manna, quails and water, clothes that did not wear down and shoes that did not wear away, the cloud and the pillar of fire, and the glory of God that was revealed at the tabernacle – all were clear signs of his acting presence.

God revealed himself to Moses in the flames in a bush. Though the bush was on fire, it was not burned up or consumed by the fire. The fire is symbolic of God's holiness. Though God is able to consume (and sometimes does indeed consume), the human can come into his presence without being consumed, just like the bush in which the fire is burning (also refer to Moses on the mountain and the elders together with him in Ex 18:12). This revelation primarily indicates the relationship between God and his people (Houtman 1993:345). When Moses went closer to investigate the phenomenon, God talked to him. The first words of God explained the relation between him and Moses. God is the Holy One. Moses had to show his reverence visually by taking off his shoes, because the ground on which he was standing was holy. God demands respect and holy reverence of the human being that comes into his presence. Later, God would reveal himself again in the lightning and smoke on the mountain where nobody and nothing were allowed to touch the mountain. In addition, his prescriptions for handling the tabernacle and the ark, the institution of the priestly office

as well as the offering services confronted Israel with his holy presence. When Aaron's sons did not revere the Lord's holiness, the Lord burnt them. Moses' words to Aaron after the event confirmed that God expected holy reverence from the human being that came into his presence (Lv 10:3):

Moses then said to Aaron, 'This is what the LORD spoke of when he said: "Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured."' Aaron remained silent.

God also revealed himself to Moses as the God that acts and saves. He did it because of his covenant, which he had concluded with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He did it by demanding to have his people back from those that had oppressed and enslaved them. Because he was in full control of the Israelites' hearts, he could say to Moses that they would listen to him. He was also going to execute his plan with Pharaoh despite of the fact that Pharaoh was going to harden his heart – even because of this – so that he could reveal his glory to his people, their enemies and the world (Levy 2005:56; Bruckner 2013:111). God revealed himself clearly in the way he delivered his people from Egypt, in the way he cared for them in the desert and in the way he gave them the Promised Land. Thus, he brought everyone who heard or experienced his deeds *coram Deo*.

God did not only reveal himself in his deeds, but also in what he said of himself. He revealed himself to Moses as (Ex 3:14, NIV): 'I am who I am'. Having done a comprehensive literature study, Snyman (1997:378) concludes that the name harbours the promise to Israel that God would always be present as a living God. Brueggemann (1997:123–124) regards Exodus as the Israelites' creed of confession regarding their God. He (Brueggemann 1997:124, n. 17) translates the name that God communicated to Moses by: 'I will be who I will be',<sup>10</sup> and says the entire Exodus is probably an exegesis of the name. He (Brueggemann 1997:123) quotes Cross, who says the name indicates the meaning of 'cause to be' or 'create, pro-create': 'Yahweh is an active agent who is the subject of an active verb [...] the God of Israel has acted in decisive and transformative ways.' God revealed himself with the name as the living and acting God. Based on his covenant relationship with his people, he directed world events with a view to deliver his people from slavery so that they could serve him in a close relationship of love (see Houtman 1993:367, 368). During all those events, he would always be what he is, and thus in every new situation, his people and the world would repeatedly come to know him (Ramn 1977:62; Roberts 2007:61; Waltke 2007:359–363). Therefore, he said repeatedly that after certain events, his people, Pharaoh and the entire Egypt would know that he is Yahweh (Ex 7:5, 17; 10:2; 14:4, 18; 16:12; 20:1; 29:46; 31:13). Levy (2005) shows that each of the plagues that God brought over Egypt was intended to expose one of the many powerless gods of Egypt (Ex 10:1–2). He continues that God instructed his people and Egypt so that they could come to know him as the God who

10. See Waltke (2007:364–366) for a grammatical-linguistic analysis of these words.

had created heaven and earth and that he was in control of all things<sup>11</sup> (Dever 2005:100; House 1998:88). Based on God's revelation of who he was, one can agree with Snyman (1997:378) when he says: *'n Ou Testamentiese spiritualiteit lê dus in die oortuiging dat die lewe geleef word in die voortdurende teenwoordigheid van God'* [An Old Testament spirituality is therefore found in the conviction that life must be lived in the continuous presence of God<sup>1</sup>].

In Exodus, the Lord also reveals himself as having special characteristics. An example is found in Exodus 34:6, where he says Yahweh is 'merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'. This self-introduction of God took place between Israel's breaking of the covenant by their worship of the golden calf and the renewal of the covenant.<sup>12</sup> After the above-mentioned declaration of the Lord, Moses could plead that the Lord would forgive his people their sins and that he would remain in their midst, despite their breaking the covenant. The Lord's answer to the pleadings of Moses is the renewal of the covenant (see Groenewald 2008:1367–1368). In the particular circumstances of the covenant violation, Yahweh was what he is, namely a merciful and graceful God. In that incident, Moses acted as mediator that stepped in to plead with God on behalf of the people and God listened to the request of Moses. Moses and Israel came to know God in a new way because of the situation and God's action in the situation.<sup>13</sup> God's revelation aroused in Moses the desire to come to know God even better, as it gave him boldness to ask God to see his glory (Ex 33:18). Moses' meeting with God was visible on his face (Philpot 2013:2, 3). Thus, every believer who lives *coram Deo* today also emanates the glory of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3; Litwa 2012). Christ is the ultimate mediator between God and his people – it was only on the ground of his work that he would come to do, that Moses could act as mediator.

With the commandment not to make an image of him (Ex 20), God forbade Israel to restrict him to their vision of him. He remains Yahweh, who will repeatedly reveal himself in a new and surprising way in every situation, far beyond what the human can pray or think (Eph 3; Motyer 2005:217). Roberts (2007) explains:

Making an image of God defines what God can or cannot be. If God is male and white, then God cannot be female and Asian. Any representation, then, is sin, because it narrows the range of possible ways God can act. Human beings, in all their complexity, are the only legitimate image of God. (p. 62)

Like some other people, Rahab was not only brought *coram Deo* by God's revelation, but also to *sursum corda*, that is, to lift her heart up to God in faith (Jos 2:2–12). The prophet Habakkuk spoke of his longing for such a clear revelation

of the presence of God (Hab 3:1, 2). In history, God has revealed himself repeatedly and undeniably in the lives of his people and the world, for example, in the lives of Daniel and his friends, and in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. At his second coming, Jesus will be visible to every eye. Meanwhile, the abundant wisdom of God becomes visible in this world through the church (Eph 3:10), but God also reveals himself by inexplicable intervention in the history of people, families, nations and the world. Earthquakes, tsunamis, governments that tumble or come into existence and children that are miraculously saved from the hands of their abductors, or merely God's continuing observance of the creation and care of the sparrows and the grass of the field (Mt 5), are all part of God's revelation.

God brings the human being *coram Deo* by revealing himself in a rich variety of ways. Service to God requires that one will notice the significance of God's revelation here and now, and base one's thoughts, talk and deeds on that awareness.

### Significance for the ministry in the congregation

The congregation that wants to observe the revelation regarding *coram Deo* in Exodus would consider the following, whilst praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

- Preaching, pastorate, catechism and all other equipping are done based on God's revelation of himself in his Word and are aimed at growing personal and intimate knowledge of God.
- Jesus Christ, in whom the full glory of God is present (Heb 1:1; Col 1), stands at the centre of the equipment that is given to the congregation.
- The Holy Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son to lead the congregation in the full truth, to teach them and to equip them (Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). The congregation searches consciously and continuously for the guidance of and fulfilment by the Spirit.
- Members are continuously challenged to test their image of God anew according to God's revelation and to behold his glory repeatedly in the light of the Word.
- In prosperity and adversity, with regard to events in the congregation, the country and the world, the congregation search for the countenance or the presence of God in their prayers and their pleadings to find out what he wants them to be and do in a specific situation. The congregation is aware that the Spirit can provide a new insight into and application of God's revelation in his Word by what is currently happening to them and to others. Frequently he opens the minds of those who live *coram Deo* to a new insight through far-reaching events or new possibilities.

### *Coram Deo* at the command of God

When one enquires about the significance of *coram Deo* in Exodus, it is important to take into account that God frequently commands the human being to come into his

11. Note the increasing knowledge that Israel and Egypt could obtain from God's revelation, according to Exodus 8:6, 18; 9:14, 29; 11:7 (Levy 2005:58).

12. See also the first structure of Exodus as given at the beginning of this article.

13. In this way, Yahweh also revealed himself as the merciful God according to Exodus 22:27, and in Exodus 20:2 and 34:14 as a jealous God (see Peels 2003:41–56).

presence. Brueggemann (1997) says the following about this topic:

Commandment dominates Israel's witness about Yahweh. Yahweh is a sovereign ruler whose will for the world is known and insisted upon. Israel as the addressee of command exists and prospers as it responds in obedience to these commands. (p. 181)

Exodus tells the story of how God delivered Israel from Pharaoh under whose command they were bound in slavery, and how he brought them under his own command. He did it as their Lord and God who made a covenant with them and who therefore had the right to demand obedience from them (Ferris 1975:192; Dever 2005:95–96). When God commanded, his command was based on his redeeming grace, on his elective love for Israel. The command emanated from a relationship that originated in the covenant and was confirmed by God's deeds. The command is at bottom reciprocal love, but it also calls for the integration of a new way of life in the people's relationship with their neighbour. God's command led the Israelite, the human being, to God's shalom. Thus, God is glorified by the human and the human shows the glory of God as it was visible in the shining face of Moses as fruit of his talks with God.

Brueggemann (2011:51–52) singles out the contrast between Pharaoh's instructions on the one hand and God's instructions in the Law (Ex 20) on the other hand. Pharaoh's instructions were hard, cold and exploitative; God's instructions may be regarded as "rules of engagement" for life with the covenanting God and life with the covenanting neighbor in a sustained world of fidelity and responsibility'. God liberated Israel to make them his people, his possession. The purpose of God's instructions was that the physical liberation would flow over in spiritual liberation – it was liberation from the Pharaoh-attitude, namely self-service, self-protection and exploitation of the neighbour. The completion of the liberation of Israel was found in complying with the law of God. According to his law, Israel could be sure that they would be fully protected and cared for by Yahweh, who had led them out of Egypt (Ex 20:1), and who showed mercy to thousands who loved him and kept his commandments – and still does (Ex 20:6). For this reason, Israel could love him and serve him – him alone – with all their heart and soul, and all their strength (Ex 20:2–11), and they could love their neighbours as themselves (Ex 20:12–17; Brueggemann 2009:23).

Although God's rule did not constitute an exploitative and oppressive relationship, it was not a voluntary relationship at all. Therefore, Moses guided the people to accept the covenant of God. Cameron (2008:128–129) points out two desperate moments at the beginning of the journey through the desert, namely the people's thirst at Mara (Ex 15) and their hunger in the Desert of Sin (Ex 16). God provided them with what they needed, without reproaching them for their rebellious grumbling. What is remarkable is that God referred the people to his law every time after he had provided in

their needs (Ex 15:25–26; 16:4). The prescriptions of the Lord for the feasts, offerings, the priests' work, et cetera, had to be executed with holy respect – both the execution of the prescriptions and the attitude in executing them flowing forth from the love relationship with God. Because of the limited scope of this article, the related topic of God's wrath on covenant violation cannot be discussed here.<sup>14</sup>

In this regard, the important relationship between covenant and kingdom catches the eye. God's kingdom is realised by means of the covenant relationship in the lives of the individual and the people.<sup>15</sup>

Service to God means that you will strive to live with holy respect, in obedience to God's instructions and in love towards God and your neighbour because of the covenant relationship.

### Significance for the ministry in the congregation

The congregation that wants to observe the revelation regarding *coram Deo* in Exodus would consider the following, while praying for the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

- The congregation is guided to knowledge of God's liberating mercy and to full certainty that they have been saved from the rule of Satan and are now standing under the rule of Christ.
- The congregation is guided to understand more and more of the fruits of covenant relationship in which they are, namely that they must live in holiness (committed to God).
- The law of God may not be banned from the worship service and in that way trying to prevent people from experiencing the church as hard and cold or legalistic. Based on the fulfilment of the law by Christ, the law must be presented as a *sine qua non* [without which it could not be] to the congregation as a rule of our gratefulness and love towards God.
- The pastoral ministry in the congregation may not be absorbed by good advice or psychological counselling, but the truth of the Word and the law of God are carried into the lives of people in an actual and healing way.
- The way in which the congregation deal with the law is of such a nature that the love of the law, which is also expressed in Psalm 119, would be nurtured in the hearts of members, because they understand that it is a light for the path and lamp to their feet.
- God's covenant demands (his Word and law), through which his kingship is realised in the hearts of people, must be handled in such a way that people are brought into the presence of God, who does not leave sins unpunished (Ex 34:16), but who is merciful and graceful.

14. See Cameron (2008), Williamson (2008), Brueggemann (2009:19–56), Murray (2011), Peels (2003:72–84) and Peels (2011) for discussions of the wrath of God and his covenant vengeance.

15. As it falls outside the spectrum of this article, it is not investigated further here. See Gentry and Wellum (2012) for a probing discussion of this theme – see especially pp. 591–602.

## **Coram Deo in the joy of God's victory, which sets his people free**

The songs of Moses and Miriam, the women's dances to the sound of tambourines and the singing of the people were spontaneous utterances of joy, *coram Deo*, after God's powerful deeds of deliverance and the victory over the enemy. Likewise, it is also revealed elsewhere in the Bible that people would spontaneously break out in songs of praise or dancing when they experience the powerful presence of God (2 Sm 6:14–16; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Ja 5:13)

Brueggemann (1997:414) says that when Israel tried to explain their existence they did indeed not offer any explanation: 'What appear to be explanations are in fact articulations of wonder, awe, astonishment, and gratitude, all addressed back to Yahweh.'

The correct reaction to God's revelation is the following according to Exodus (see Kangas 1999:17–18): believe (Ex 4:31; 14:31), see (Ex 2:2; 14:30, 31; 20:18; 24:10; 33:10; 34:30; 39:43),<sup>16</sup> serve (Ex 3:12; 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 26; 20:5; 23:24, 25), build (Ex 36-39), and joy in song and by celebrating feasts (Ex 5:1; 10:9; 12:14,17; 13:6; 15:1–21; 23:14, 15, 16, 18; 32:5; 34:18, 22, 25).

In Exodus, however, it is also clearly shown that each of these reactions might either be superficial on the grounds of the advantages one might gain from them, or they might flow from a growing relationship with God. The people showed repeatedly that they did not experience a deeper dimension in their relationship with God, because they did not trust him and their love for him did not increase. Therefore, as soon as it seemed as if God was not going to provide for their needs, they grumbled (Ex 15:24; 16:7, 8). They then said that Egypt had been better and they would rather go back there (Ex 32:1, 23). Moses, in contrast, demonstrated by his actions a deep relationship with the Lord. He wished to see the glory of God (Ex 33:18) and he refused to go further if God did not go with them (Ex 33:15). Joshua and Caleb's trust in God is contrasted to the people's unbelief and timidity in Numbers 13 to 14. Joy in the Lord must go further than joy because of deliverance from physical bondage and misery. It should manifest itself in God who brings about deliverance, and in trust that God will save and provides and will do it time after time, however miserable the prospects may seem. The purpose of deliverance from slavery is only attained when the people saved from slavery are also saved from being blinded by the visible situation and when they are able to see every situation in light of their relationship with the Saviour and his power and glory. God gains victory over the enemy. For this purpose, he uses people in his service without the victory being dependent on their contributions. After the victory has been achieved, the saved ones have to repeatedly gain victory over unbelief, selfishness, self-pity and timidity – all because of the joy about God's victory

<sup>16</sup>The visible appearance of God's glory is a theme that surfaces repeatedly in Exodus (Ex 16:7, 10; 24:16, 17; 29:43; 33:18, 22; 40:34, 35) and that would justify a separate study, with the inclusion of participation in God's glory by those who stand in the correct relationship with God (like Moses, whose face shone after every meeting with God).

and the joy in God, who has led them out of slavery. The completed salvation flows over into a process in which salvation becomes subjectively part of one's life (see Gentry & Wellum 2012:602–611). This subjective experience of salvation and the significance of salvation as well as the knowledge where salvation is exclusively to be found, arouse spontaneous praise in the heart and mouth of the human being. The completed salvation brings inextinguishable hope, which enables the human being to expect and see new possibilities (Brueggemann 1987:1–26).

Just think of Jesus' song of praise when he praised God for the revelation of this deeper dimension to some, calling out (Mt 11:25 – NIV): 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.'

Also, one could share the jubilation of Paul in Romans 11:33 (NIV) when he cries out: 'Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!' You could also listen to the angels and the elders singing before God's throne (Rv 5:12 – ESV): 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!'

### **Significance for the congregation**

- When a congregation is busy with God's Word and his service work, their activities must lead to amazement about the almighty God and therefore also to praise (see De Klerk 2002; De Smidt 2006; Styger & Human 2005).
- The liturgy of the worship service (including the worship services where special occasions are celebrated, such as services where baptism takes place, profession of faith takes place, the holy communion is celebrated, Christ's birth or crucifixion is commemorated, etc.) must be organised as festive occasions.
- The atmosphere of every congregational gathering must testify to the joy of being able to live *coram Deo*.
- Paul's instruction in Philippians 4 must be obeyed. He calls out: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!'
- The entire congregational ministry must testify to the certainty that the victory had been obtained and that nothing can separate us from God's love. A melancholic and loser mentality must be foreign to the congregation; sorrow should only be shown when humiliation and confession is necessary (Jm 4:9, 10).
- Based on Christ's work of salvation, preaching and the pastoral ministry must be embarked upon with a view to comfort, heal, admonish and encourage so that the sinner or bereaved may praise God; even if light has not yet broken through the darkness.

## **Conclusion**

A few aspects regarding a life in the presence of God, as revealed in the Book of Exodus, have been researched in this article and applied to practical congregational ministry.

From the research it has become clear that the ministry can be largely enriched when the congregation are purposefully guided and equipped to come together, serve and live in God's presence. It has also become clear that a wealth of information on this topic could still be researched in the Book of Exodus and the rest of the Old Testament, which cannot be attend to in this article due to the extent of it.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

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