Law, Love, and Redemption: Legal Connotations in the Language of Exodus 6:6–8

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We are familiar with the form-critical category of the lawsuit in prophetic literature, so-named because of particular expressions in prophecy which are taken from the courtroom. This determination then serves as an important factor in interpretation, by identifying an additional context for the prophecy. There are other Biblical texts whose style may not cast them fully into the legal genre, but whose language contains enough connotations to support a legal background, undercurrent, or “subtext.” I submit that Exodus 6 is one such place and that the legal implications of its language are critical for understanding its contents.

The eloquence of God’s speech to Moses in Exod. 6:2–8 has drawn attention from antiquity until modern times. The Midrash derives the central obligation to drink four cups of wine at the Passover Seder from two of the verses (6–7), because they contain “four redemptions: ‘I will free you . . . and deliver you . . . I will redeem you . . . And I will take you to be My people’.” The rabbis, who associated the rhetoric of this passage with a major religious observance, were not the only ones to be impressed by its style; contemporary Biblical commentators sought the impact of this pericope in various literary features, the most prominent being the arrangement of its ideas in a series of verbs—of which the rabbis stressed four—which are all cast in a single grammatical pattern.

Without doubt, this plethora of first-person verbs, which forcefully herald the Divine action about to come, holds the key to the speech. Many Biblical commentators before us have noted this fact and explained the details of its workings. By grouping these predicates differently and ascribing novel connotations to each of them, and to the groups into which they seem to fall, we may arrive at a new understanding of the verbal series in verses 6–8, which comprise the dynamic section of the speech. I would like to suggest that our observations about the verbs in these

1. The importance of this speech for biblical source criticism is found in its contents, not its literary qualities; it is the latter which concerns us here.
2. TY, Pesahim 10, 1; Genesis Rabbah 88,5. Mishnah Pesahim ch. 10 is wholly constructed around the four cups, showing their centrality to the Seder, but does not explain the basis for the custom. Pesahim 117b notes: “These four cups the Rabbis instituted as a sign of redemption.”
3. There is no assurance that the midrashic explanation is the source for the custom; other midrashim offer different derivations, and none of them are necessarily the historic source (see previous note).
three verses imbue the entire section with an additional source of strength that may have gone unnoticed.

Nehama Leibowitz treated this passage extensively on the grammatical and stylistic planes, and we here sum up her analysis as representative of previous scholarship. She noted that not only four but seven consecutive verbs are cast in the qātāl pattern with wāw conversive, which renders all of them a single mode of expression, a rhetorical surge of God’s redemptive force. In addition to the sequence “free, deliver, redeem, take” cited above, we find “be, bring, give” in the same pattern. However, within this dynamic series one can make internal distinctions. Thus, the fifth verb, הָיוֹדְיָה, “and I will be your God” (v. 7), may be considered the goal of the first four actions. The sixth and seventh forms, יִתְנָה, “I will bring you . . . and I will give it to you” (v. 8), refer to the entry into the Land subsequent to the redemption and mark the end of the verbal series.

Moving on to the lexical sphere, Leibowitz found further gradations of meaning in each of the first four verbs: wēḥōṣé’ēti is the actual physical removal from Egypt, to be performed by Moses; wēhīṣalti is God’s direct action; wēgā’alti is “an action done by a relative” (Lev. 25:25); wēlāqāhṭi “is more intimate.” Benno Jacob, whom she cites in this regard, ranks them emotionally: God’s actions are predicated on His sense of justice, mercy, closeness, and love. Following this analysis of the predicates, Leibowitz distinguishes between the prepositions and indirect objects.

In the first clause, Egypt is directly mentioned; in the second, only the forced labor; in the third and fourth, the indirect objects are God’s outstretched arm and finally לְי— the Lord Himself. The four redemptions thus move away from the threat of an external enemy to focus on God Almighty and the intimacy between Himself and the Israelite people.

Returning to consider the entire chain of seven verbs, she notes that there is an additional eighth predicate in the latter half of v. 7, “And you shall know (יִדְעוּתָה) that I, the Lord, am your God,” which differs from the others both in content and form. In content, because it is not an act of redemption by God but rather the response of the redeemed. In form, because it alone is cast in the second person plural, whereas the other seven verbs are in first person singular. In other words, the grammatical subject of the seven—the actor—is God, but the subject and actor of “and you shall know” is Israel. How does this phrase fit in to the entire chain of successive redemptive acts to be performed by God alone?

R. Hayyim ibn Atar sharpened the question: If “and you shall know” be regarded as the consequence of redemption, it should appear at the very end of

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4. Nehama Leibowitz, Iyyunim Hadashim besefer Shemot, 91–94. This comment seems to be based on Cassuto ad loc., for which see later on in this paper.
6. In his commentary Ohr Hahayyim, cited by Leibowitz (see n. 4 above).
God's redemptive acts, after “I will bring” and “I will give” in v. 8, not after the first five verbs alone. He therefore proposes that “and you shall know” is really a condition for further redemptive acts by God: if you accept that God is the Lord after the first four actions of redemption, then He shall bring you to the Promised Land and give you possession of it. Leibowitz herself rejects this explanation as syntactically untenable, since no particular word or construction signals the supposed change from indicative sentences to a conditional “if you accept . . . then.” On the contrary, the thrust of the verbal chain calls for further promises by God. How is this expectation fulfilled by a verb in the second person whose subject is not God but Israel?

At this point Leibowitz abandons literary analysis and attempts a “philosophical” solution to the problem, claiming that “to know” that God is the Lord—to be cognizant of this fact—is itself a divine promise and blessing. True to the verbal chain, "and you shall know" is also an act of God, a divinely bestowed consciousness, a gift which even supersedes the previous promise, “and I shall be your God.” For to know that God reigns supreme is something apart from the fact itself. Leibowitz bolsters this theology with quotations from rabbinic literature and Maimonides, but not from the Bible.

Further, she finds that the phrase which contains the problematic predicate, “and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God,” arouses associations with the Decalogue on Sinai, especially with its opening statement, “I the Lord am your God . . .” (Exod. 20:2). Just as the Ten Commandments were given between the Exodus from Egypt and the entry into Canaan, so too the clause “and you shall know that I, the Lord, am your God” in v. 7 was placed between the first five verbs, which describe the redemption from Egypt, and the last two, which speak of the entry into the Land of Canaan. This analogy explains why "and you shall know" is not at the end of the verbal chain but rather in the middle.

In our opinion, the association with the Decalogue is of interest, since v. 7 reads, “I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians,” and the first commandment is “I the Lord am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage” (20:2). But it is difficult to believe that any analogy such as Leibowitz draws between two chapters in Exodus could dictate the placement of the single verb ידועות within the verbal chain. Frankly, both the philosophical explanation of ידועות as a divine gift and the use of analogy to explain the positioning of the verb do not even qualify as midrashic homiletics, much less as straightforward Biblical commentary. Further, the allusion to the Decalogue is irrelevant both to the meaning of the verb ידועות “And you shall know” and its form in the second person, the two points which originally piqued Leibowitz’s exegetical interest.

Cassuto portrays the latter part of the pericope (6:6–8) as “seven sentences which open with seven verbs in the first person, connected to each other by וַאֲ. . . the first three (v. 6) mark the redemption, the middle two (v. 7) determine the reciprocal relationship between God and Israel; the last two (v. 8) relate to the

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7. This is reminiscent of the discussion about the phrase “the Lord shall be my God,” in the context of Jacob’s vow (Gen. 28:21). Following five conditional phrases, is this clause the result or a further conditional? See N. Leibowitz, Iyyunim besefer Bereshit (Jerusalem, 1966), 212–15.

8. Jacob, Exodus, 160, also connects to our text the events at Sinai.
conquest of the Land.” He links “And I will take you (wēlāqaḥtī) to be my people” with “you shall be My treasured possession (sēgullāḥ)” in Exod. 19:6 but provides no justification for this particular connection, and he finds in the verb wēhāyîtī (v. 7) a hint to the Divine name which is derived from the same root. He does not question the placement or grammatical form of yirdēḥāḥ but sees in “And you shall know” a contrast to Pharaoh’s “I do not know the Lord” (Exod. 5:2).

In sum, “the entire speech, in its elevated style which is close to metric poetry, in its triple repetition . . . of the formula ‘I am the Lord’, in its seven languages of promise which come in sequence like hammerblows . . . makes a very strong impression, as befits the serious nature of the matter at hand.” Cassuto has in mind the entire speech, vv. 2–8. As for the verses on which we are focusing, 6–8, Cassuto saw significance in the number seven; but why were these particular verbs selected, and in this particular order?

I would like to suggest that the second part of this speech (vv. 6–8) contains not seven significant verbs, but nine, and that these are divided equally over three verses and fall into three distinct groups. This structure is analogous to the so-called “Ten Plagues,” which actually fall into three groups of three each, the tenth being in a class by itself. There is a common background to all these verbs, and it is this common motif which provides the justification for the redemption. Within this rubric, however, each distinct group has a different emphasis. The three groups are: free—deliver—redeem (v. 6); take—be—know (v. 7); bring—swore—give (v. 8). I proceed to explain each grouping and its components.

Free—Deliver—Redeem

The first group of verbs relates to the emancipation of slaves. The verb, נָצַר “to go out” of slavery, is the standard Biblical and rabbinic idiom; e.g., וַהֲבָשֵׁבֵית נָצַר (Exod. 21:2), וַיָּשַׁב נָצַר פָּרָה (21:11), והֲבַשֵּׁבֵית נָצַר לָא לְפָרָה (Mekhilta Neziqin 1 [p. 248]).

The second verb, נָשַל, in the Hifil stem hiššil, generally means “to save,” but has a particular meaning: “to remove, take back,” i.e., to regain possession and thereby legal ownership. This meaning for נָשַל is found in the Bible in texts with a clear legal background, such as Gen. 31:9, wāyyaṣṣāl ʾēlōhīm ʾet miqnē ʾābikēm wayyitten li “God has taken away your father’s livestock and given it to me.” The common meaning “to save” has no place here. Since Jacob felt that the flocks were his by prior agreement with Laban, God was simply righting a wrong and “taking back” the sheep on behalf of Jacob.

Similarly, Jephthah the Gileadite’s claim before the king of Ammon: “Why have you not tried to recover them [the cities] all this time?” (Judg. 11:26). The Hebrew
reads *hisšaltem* and the entire context is that of a legal argument; if you have not reclaimed these cities in the past three hundred years, says Jephthah, then you have forfeited your right to them.

This usage of *nṣl* is further attested in Aramaic texts from Egypt, particularly in the Elephantine texts. Of particular interest to us is BMAP 2, a marriage contract which speaks of the manumission of a slave-woman, Tamut, in order to marry one Ananiah. Tamut had previously borne a son, Pilṭi, whom she brought with her into the marriage. The agreement between her former owner, Meshullam, and the groom Ananiah stipulates that in no event may Meshullam “be able to snatch Pilṭi away from under your [Ananiah’s] heart.” The Aramaic reads: לָא אַכְלָא אַנְצֵל לְפִלְטִי מָן הַחַתָּה.

Several features here demand our attention. First, “to snatch” has as its object a person. Secondly, note that the preposition required by *nṣl* is *mn tht*, “from under,” the very expression used with our first verb, *wēhiṣšalti*, “and I will free you from [under] the burdens of Egypt.” Thirdly, the context is one of slavery. All these features are to be found in Exod. 18:10, “Who delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians;” *ʾasher ḥizl ṭaʿeḥū ṭaḥāṭ ḥet ṭi ṭeʾirim*, which employs *nṣl* *mn tht*. It is clear that the entire phrase carries, besides the obvious meaning “to save,” also the legal connotation that God “repossessed” that which was rightfully His. Note that the subject of this sentence (Exod. 18:10) is the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt. Returning to our verse, though the obvious meaning of *wēhiṣšalti* is “to save,” in light of the parallels just cited the legal connotation of *nṣl* as repossessing in order to regain ownership is also present by allusion.

The last verb in the triad, *gål*, is also drawn from legal terminology and indicates the redemption of close relatives sold into slavery. “If a resident alien among you has prospered, and your brother, being in straits, comes under his authority . . . he shall have the right of redemption . . . One of his brothers shall redeem him” (Lev. 25:47–48). In this pericope, the root *gål* appears eight times. Of special interest are vv. 54–55:

ראָם אֵין כְּלָלָה רֶכֶל בֵּיתָהוּ בָּהֵן עַמּוֹ: כִּי לֹא מִי יָרֵא לָׁוָּהוּ. כָּלָה הַשֵּׁרַד

ורֶכֶל אָחָה אַחָא אֲנַשְּׁי כָּרֵם.

If he has not been redeemed in any of those ways, he and his children with him shall go free in the jubilee year. For it is to Me that the Israelites are servants; they are My servants. . . .

In other words, when *gēʾullāh* is not feasible, the mode of redemption signified by *gāʾal* is to be replaced by that of *yāšāʾ*, which is the verb used for the general emancipation of slaves. Further, the justification given for redeeming close relatives from foreign ownership is that the children of Israel are slaves of the Lord, “whom I freed

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14. This is the translation given by Bezalel Porten, *Jews of Elephantine and Arameans of Syene: Aramaic Texts with Translation* (Jerusalem, 1974), 38–41. Done in collaboration with Greenfield, the translation “to snatch away” was later objected to by Greenfield as “exaggerated” in the first article cited in the previous note (see there, 118, n. 4).
from the Land of Egypt” (loc. cit.). If legal redemption of an individual is explained in Leviticus by the historic redemption from Egypt, in Exodus 6 the historic context of the Exodus is given a legal basis by using three terms of individual emancipation from servitude: yš, nšl, gšl.¹⁵

Take—Be—Know

Lāqah, the first verb in the second set, is used hundreds of times for taking of any sort. But when the verb lqḥ is followed by the direct object after the particle ḫet (or suffixed to it), the indirect object lī, and second indirect object preceded by l-, it indicates the marriage relationship: ḫet ḫat ḫāla wēlāqaḥti (Gen. 34:4); ḫet ḫāla ḫat ḫēlā wēlāqaḥti, (Gen. 12:19), ḫet ḫāla ḫēlā wēlāqaḥti (Judg. 14:2). This expression, which is virtually a marriage formula, is to be found in verse 7: ללקחת את אבס יה ואמ — save that לֵּאֵ֔שׁא, “(take) as wife,” has been replaced by לֵּאֵ֔ם, “(take) as a people.” The second verb, “and I will be (ytyyhw) your God” (v. 7), is the complement to wēlāqaḥti and indicates the marriage relation as well. We find the predicate “to be” at the heart of the Jewish marriage formula in the opening statement of the traditional marriage contract (ketubba), ḫת ḫא ḫלא, “Be mine in marriage.” Like wēlāqaḥti, “and I will take,” the verb wēḥāviyīti is also followed by the indirect object lī and the second indirect object with l-, making it an exact parallel to the first formula with the verb lāqaḥti. The two formulae are complementary: the first contains the groom’s words to the father of the bride, and the second, addressed to the bride, expresses the groom’s “being” or “belonging to” his betrothed. In the context of redemption, God as groom announces His intention to “take” His bride from those who control her, in this case the Egyptians.

At first blush, the analogy to the actual marriage formula requires, in place of וְּלָלָ֔קַח, the verb וְּלָלָ֔קַח in second-person, which is what we find in Lev. 26:12: “I will be your God, and you shall be My people” — וְּלָלָ֔קַח יְּהֹוָ֖ה יִשְׂרָאֵל יִתְנַשֵּׁ֣א — here, however, the verb לֵּאֵ֔ם has nothing to do with slavery (ibid., 403).

¹⁵. We are thus in full agreement with scholars who have identified gšl in our passage with the legal and social realm of slavery. These studies are listed in J. Unterman, “The Socio-Legal Origin for the Image of God as Redeemer of Israel,” in D. Wright et al., eds., Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies . . . in Honor of Jacob Milgrom (Indiana, 1995), 401, nn. 1–5. So, for example, H. Ringgren, Theological Dictionary of the O.T., 2: 354: “The association with the ‘secular’ release from the duty of slavery is evident.” Unterman himself rejects this association, on the grounds that ytlxhw has nothing to do with slavery (ibid., 403).

¹⁶. E. L. Greenstein, in Wayne Meeks, ed., HarperCollins Study Bible, (New York, 1993), 88, saw the reciprocal phrases in v. 7 as a formula of legal adoption, adducing proof from Lev. 26:12, “I will be your God, and you shall be My people,” and from 2 Sam. 7:14, “I will be to him for a father, and he shall be to Me for a son”; however, while the two prooftexts are similar to each other, our verse which opens with the predicate wēlāqaḥti is different. Further, I believe that the third verb in our verse, wiyda’tem, is intimately connected to the first two predicates and determines what sort of formula the verse refers to, on which see below. Finally, Lev. 26:12 itself can be adduced as proof for the expression of Israel’s relation to God in terms of marriage, as its wording is the reversal of Hosea’s זְכָּר נָ֜א לָֽא יִתְנַשֵּׁא, which we have explained as a divorce formula. On this point as well, see further below. F. I. Andersen, D. N. Freedman, Hosea, Anchor Bible (New York, 1980), 197–98, also cite Hos. 1:9, Lev. 26:12, and 2 Sam. 7:14 together, but mention neither marriage nor adoption as the legal link between them. The word they use for all three
likewise expresses the reciprocity of marriage by use of the first person, in the same way that the ancient Aramaic formula found at Elephantine, "She is my wife and I am her husband," is symmetrical and reciprocal, even though the bride is referred to by the groom in the third person (יה), rather than the second.\textsuperscript{17} In point of fact, all these formulae combine first-person and second-person (והיה) or first-person and third-person references. Our verse has a second-person element as well, in the form of the objectsCow, אתנש ילב תחת. If the marriage formula which we have identified in our text seems to be overbearing in its use of first-person predicates, "I will take, I will be," this is in keeping with the entire speech, which stresses God's solo performance as Redeemer through first-person verbs. He is the groom who turns to Israel, the bride, and actively commits Himself to her in marriage—והיה ילב אל-הליכים—rather than using the more conventional, but more passive, "she is (or 'you are') my bride (or 'people')."\textsuperscript{18}

Further support that \textit{wēlāqāhîti} indicates the parallel marriage vow to \textit{wēlāqāhîti}, is to be found in the expressions cited for divorce by Hosea—not the much-discussed formula in 2:4 but rather the earlier phrase which indicates God's displeasure (1:9): "כ יבשות לא תמי אדםי לא אהיה לכב. In the context of the formulae discussed above, this divorce formula doubly negates the "being" of the marriage relationship. The first phrase, "For you are not my people," negates the "being" of the traditional formula "Be mine in marriage,"\textsuperscript{19} while the second phrase can be viewed as the linguistic reversal of the formula in our text (v. 7): "And I will be your God," והיה ילב, is replaced in Hosea by לכב א לא אראה לכב, lit., "and I shall not be to you."\textsuperscript{20}

The two verbs in v. 7 of our text, \textit{wēlāqāhîti}, \textit{wēlāyîti}, are climaxed by the third verb \textit{yādā}, "to know," which distinctly connotes sexual union (also in marriage). To cite two examples among many, "Now the man knew (yādā) his wife Eve" (Gen. 4:1); returning to Hosea, we find: "I shall betroth you to me in faithfulness.

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\textsuperscript{17} For example, \textit{AP} 15:4.

\textsuperscript{18} However, one can also make a case for a certain softness in this expression, as if God were committing Himself to Israel in this verse both in the language of the groom and the bride, "and I shall be your God" meaning "I shall belong to you," cf. Song 6:3. On the use of feminine metaphors in this verse, see further, n. 21.

\textsuperscript{19} We do not assume that the traditional Jewish Aramaic formula was in use in Hosea's time, but possibly there was a Hebrew equivalent. Hosea himself suggests such a possibility in 2:25: והיהי אל_temperature which indicates that "You are My people" was modeled on a current marriage formula. Indeed an identical formulation is to be found in the Elephantine Aramaic papyri, as cited above: וי אנחיה והיה אל-לחם, "she is my wife and I am her husband".

\textsuperscript{20} If the entire point of Hosea's \textit{א לא אראה לכב} is the reversal of the formula, clearly there is no need to emend \textit{א לא אראה לכב} to \textit{א לא ראיה לכב} "your God," as did BH 3. See Andersen and Freedman, \textit{Hosea}, 198.
Then you shall know \((wēyāda’at)\)\(^{21}\) the Lord” (2:22). The metaphor of marriage serves the religious relationship well, the verb “to know” expressing both tenor and vehicle in its double entendre of cognition and congress. In our verse as well, after God’s relation to Israel is stated in terms of betrothal and marriage, “knowing” the Lord—ירדית—he cannot mean cognitive knowledge alone.\(^{22}\) It certainly implies the consummation of the relation in love.

Consequently, we do not find the change of voice in the form “and you shall know” (Exod. 6:7) from first to second person to be a problem, as it was for Leibowitz, but rather an affirmation of our thesis: just as the groom’s “I shall betrothe” (Hos. 2:22) is matched by “Then you shall know”, so too “I will take you” in verse 7 is matched by “And you shall know.” As we have seen, reciprocity, including grammatical symmetry, is the very essence of the marriage relationship in its various formulae.\(^{23}\)

**Bring—Swore—Give**

Admittedly, this last group is at best a mixed bag. The words \(wēhēbē’ti, \)wēnātatti in first-person qātal with wāw conversive conform to the earlier verbs in the speech, while nāšā’ti does not. Further, as opposed to all previous verbs, nāšā’ti appears in a subordinated relative clause. For this reason, it did not affect Cassuto’s significant count of seven predicates and Leibowitz, who dealt with the exceptional form and meaning of wiyda’tem, did not discuss the form nāšā’ti at all. Nevertheless, we will argue that all three verbs in this group add substantially to the web of legal references while further echoing the marriage metaphor.

The first verb in the series, \(wēhēbē’ti \)étken \(\)el hā’àres, “I will bring you into the land,” continues the connotation of marriage begun in the previous set by using the phrase “to bring x into.” To bring into, more specifically, into one’s home, is a reference to marriage: “And you see among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her and would take her to wife, you shall bring her (wāhabē’tāh \(\)el) into your house . . .” (Deut. 21:11–12). “Bringing into” one’s house is thus the following stage in the marriage.\(^{24}\) After taking Israel unto Himself in the second group of verbs, God now promises to bring her into His household, the land which He swore to her fathers.

In the Babylonian Code of Hammurapi, ca. 1750 B.C.E., the phrase “to enter someone’s home” seems to mean to marry him:.

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\(^{21}\) The idiom does not describe sexual intercourse, although the verb is so used elsewhere in the Bible, since in that usage the subject is male”; Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 284. In the metaphorical sense we are suggesting for our verse (Exod. 6:7), the subject, Israel, is also “female.” Certainly marriage is the relationship intended in both Exodus and Hosea, and without doubt the sexual connotation is also present.

\(^{22}\) And therefore not solely a philosophical idea, as Leibowitz supposes.

\(^{23}\) The parallel between Exodus and Hosea in the matter of second-person YD is another reason, if one were necessary, to reject H. L. Ginsberg’s emendation of \(wēyāda’at\) in Hos. 2:22 to \(u-wē-da’at\) ‘and with devotion to’, “since the second person [for the first] appears wrong anyway”; “Hosea, Book of,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 8:1011.

\(^{24}\) Cf. Ruth 4:11; Song 3:4.

\(^{25}\) A full discussion of *in domum deductio* and its place in marriage can be found in Westbrook, “Old Babylonian Marriage Law,” 2: 127.
debt incurred before marrying that woman, his creditors will not seize his wife; and if that woman has a debt incurred before entering the man's house, her creditors will not seize her husband.

The relevant line in Akkadian is: šumma sinništum šî lāma ana bit awîlim irrubu, using a form of the verb erēbu, “to enter,” which is the cognate of Hebrew bw’, “to come in.” Further, we find the šafîl form of this verb, which corresponds exactly with Hebrew hifîl wāhabētāh, “and you shall bring her in,” used in the same sense:

§145 . . . that man may marry the šugitū and bring her into his house;

In Akkadian: awîlum šû šugītam ihḥaz ana bitišu ušerrebsī.26 Moreover, in Ugaritic, we find an even more striking parallel to the verb forms לַהֲכַה, הַבָּא in our verses. In the Kirta epic, the pair lqírb, identical to Hebrew lāqah/hēbi’, connotes marriage. Here too, a cognate of the verb erēbu appears in the šafîl stem:27

hm. hry. hty / iqḥ.
aš’rb. ĝlmt / ḫry.
If I take Huraya into my palace,
And have the girl enter my court.

In addition to the formulaic expression of marriage, the term “bring you into the land” connotes physical union with the land, in the sense that Isaiah said, “For as a young man espouseth a virgin, so shall thy sons espouse thee; And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, So shall thy God rejoice over thee” (62:5). Our phrase wēhēbē’î . . . 2el rings closely to wayyābō’ 2ēleyhā, “slept with her” (e.g., Gen. 38:18). Both connotations of wēhēbē’î, that of a formal stage in marriage and that of sexual intimacy, continue the marriage metaphor begun in the middle triad of verbs, while the second connotation also transfers the sense of intimacy from the people to the land.

Having seen that wēhēbē’î, though said of the land, remains well within the sphere of marriage, we now turn to the last verb in the series, nāttāti. The simple meaning of this verb introduces the legal sphere of property ownership: God “will give” the land “to you for a possession” (v. 8). Across the ancient Near East, the verb nātan and its cognates had the legal sense of conveyance or transfer of property, particularly in the coordinate use of the verbs našū-nadānu, presented here in their well-attested Akkadian forms. This Akkadian formula has its parallels in several Semitic languages.28 Among the West-Semitic cognates, of particular interest to us are Biblical lāqah-ntn, Aramaic hnṣl-ntn, Mishnaic Hebrew maṣṣā’ umattān, Midrashic ntn-ṇṭl. Greenfield and others have written extensively about these terms;29 our pericope, not cited by them, adds a dimension to the discussion.

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26. The laws and their translations are from Martha T. Roth, Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor (Atlanta, 1995), 110, 109.
27. I thank Prof. Greenstein for the references to the Akkadian and Ugaritic literature. The Kirta epic is cited from his translation in Ugaritic Narrative Poetry, ed. Simon B. Parker (Atlanta, 1997), 20 (CAT 1.14, col. iv:40−42).
28. Greenfield, “našū-nadānu” (see n. 13).
If we ignore the spheres of slavery and marriage and focus only on the area of property ownership, it is remarkable that our speech contains four of the verbs that appear in the various conveyance formulae described above: nsî, lqî, ntn—and ns'. It is true that the formula našû-nadânu or its cognates as such do not appear, but that is exactly the point—the legal background to the historical events of the Exodus and the possession of the Land are herein implied, rather than explicitly stated. This situation is once again paralleled by Hosea, where we find ʾanôki nûattî lâh ha-dâgân (2:10), wêlêgahtî dêgûni bêʾittô wehîssaltî simrî wêfištî (v. 11). Israel having been unfaithful to the legal institution of marriage, God is within His rights to repossess, take back, that which He had given her as part of His marital obligations. The concepts of marriage and law are intertwined and implied in the prophetic idiom of Hosea; they also color the background of our text, which is primarily a narrative, not a legal tract.

Secondly, in addition to its place in the area of legal conveyance in the phrase našû-nadânu, the significance of the verb nûattî for marriage in the form of (a) Akkadian nadânum, which indicates that the parents relinquish control over the bride to the groom, (b) Biblical Hebrew mattân, and (c) Aramaic and late Hebrew nêdûnyâ “dowry,” all from the same root ntn/ndn, hardly needs mention. Thus the last set of verbs introduces terminology from the realm of property conveyance while reinforcing the connotations of marriage begun in the previous triad.

In sum, the common motif for all nine verbs in the speech is to be found in their legal overtones. Together they provide a multitude of reasons for God's right to redeem His people: they are His slaves or relatives held in bondage by another, and are therefore entitled to emancipation; He is a groom who announces His intentions of marriage to His fiancée's guardians and then to her; He comes as a king who by dint of His power can convey possession of land and people at his discretion. Within the marriage metaphor, not only do the verbs recall traditional marriage formulae, they also evoke the range of emotional and physical bonds which tie husband and wife through the equivocal expressions “and you shall know” (v. 7), “and I shall

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30. The verb nûššî, whose obvious meaning is “swore,” stands with nûattî in the same verse to connote the našû-nadânu formula. In addition, the relative clause itself reads: אֶת מַעַרְיָא אָתְיָא יְדֵי הָלָה אָתְיהָ, thus compounding this wordplay.

31. In light of the evidence adduced in this study, there is room to reinvestigate the parallel expressions in Hosea and the Pentateuch regarding the Exodus. Such a study was done by U. Cassuto, “The Prophet Hosea and the Books of the Pentateuch,” Biblical and Canaanite Literature (Jerusalem, 1983), 118–34 [in Hebrew]. We would examine the phrase אֵיךְ יְדֵי חִנָּם (Hos. 13:5) in relation to Exod. 6:3, 7 וְיָדֶה יָדֶה יָדֶה כִּי אָכַד (I did know thee in the wilderness) (Cassuto, ibid., 132, did not make this association.

32. The corresponding biblical expression is: ‘eṭ bitti nûattî lâʾīš hazzeh, “I gave my daughter to this man” (Deut. 22:16).

33. As in Gen. 34:12: “Ask of me a bride price (mîhâr) ever so high, as well as gifts (mattân). . . .”

34. The našû-nadânu formula, in the form of iššî-iddîn, is used for the royal grant. In the biblical parallels with lqî-ntn, “God's sovereign power is expressed” in transferring the wives of X to Y (2 Sam. 12:11), the kingdom to another (1 Kgs. 1:35), and in God's absolute power over human life (Job 1:21). See Greenfield, “našû-nadânu,” 88–89.
bring . . . into” (v. 8) which connote legal, cognitive, and sexual nuances simultaneously. The power of this speech thus lies not only in the flurry of divine activity indicated by the four redemptions or the seven promises made by God, but in the underlying conviction of this text that the redemption from Egypt was an inalienable right of God and Israel together by virtue of law and love, once He chose Israel to be His own.35

35. Is it too much to hazard that this speech is really the *verba solemnia* of God? On the entire concept, see Greengus, “Marriage Contract,” 515ff.; speaking of oral formulations for marriage, he notes: “This suggested use of *verba solemnia* . . . agrees with the recognized use of oral formulas in archaic legal systems. The purpose of these formulas would be to pledge a mutual ‘troth’, a promise of mutual fidelity and regard . . . ” (520). Expressions of mutual pledge are found elsewhere, such as Deut. 26:17–18: “You have affirmed this day that the Lord is your God. . . . And the Lord has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people . . . ” If we take the Divine speech in Exod. 6:2–8 as God’s pledge or oral contract, there is a particular poignance to the continuation of the Biblical narrative: “But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses” (Exod. 6:9)—the pledge went unrequited.