The Goal of True Worship: Pagan Names and Divine Glory

Introduction: God's Ultimate Goal—True Worship from All Nations

The genealogical records of Numbers 1 and elsewhere in the Old Testament preserve personal and place names containing theophoric elements derived from Canaanite, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian deities. Examples include Ahira (Numbers 1:15), "My brother is Ra," and Gad (Genesis 30:11), the deity of fortune. At first glance, these names appear incompatible with Israel's monotheistic covenant. Yet their unrebuked retention reveals God's singular, supreme purpose: the attainment of true worship from every tribe, tongue, and nation, encompassing even those whose religious impulses have been misdirected toward false gods.

Jesus articulates this divine goal in John 4:23: "The Father is seeking such to worship him in spirit and truth." God actively seeks worshipers—not merely obedience, not merely covenant faithfulness, but worship that glorifies His name. This seeking is inherently missionary and redemptive: God pursues His own glory by transforming corrupted human aspirations into authentic adoration. If worship is God's ultimate end, then the presence of pagan theophoric elements in Scripture demonstrates His sovereign strategy: meeting mankind where he is, preserving even misdirected religious impulses as raw material for redemption, and thereby maximizing the diversity and richness of worship that will eventually surround His throne (Revelation 7:9-10).

The pagan names in Scripture testify to what church fathers and Reformers recognized as humanity's innate yet corrupted religious impulse. Augustine of Hippo (354–430) famously opens his *Confessions* with: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (I.i.1). This restlessness—manifested in pagan worship of storm-gods like Baal or fertility deities like Astarte—stems from humanity's creational design for divine fellowship, yet is utterly misdirected by sin. Augustine argues that even the noblest pagan aspirations toward beauty, order, or protection betray a "dissatisfaction" arising from the fall, yielding only "fruitless joys" that cannot satisfy (*Confessions* I.xiv). In *The City of God* (X.3), he writes: "All men know what God is... but they do not all worship Him as God," because sin suppresses truth (Romans 1:18–20).

Building on this Augustinian foundation, John Calvin articulated the *sensus divinitatis*—the innate sense of God implanted in all humanity by virtue of creation (Romans 1:19-20). Calvin argued that even the "grossest idolatry" testifies to the *semen religionis* ("seed of religion") within every person (*Institutes* I.iii.1). Critically, both Augustine and Calvin safeguard against any notion of merit in this yearning: Romans 3:11 states unequivocally that "no one seeks God" apart from divine initiative. The impulse encoded in names like Ahira or Gad reflects not human goodness but the *imago Dei* with its intent unrealized—aspirations real yet misdirected, "groping in darkness until sovereign mercy redirects them to

Christ" (Augustine, *Confessions* III.i).

This paper argues that the acceptance of pagan onomastic elements demonstrates three aspects of God's worship design: (1) heart orientation matters supremely over external nomenclature, (2) cultural diversity enriches worship by divine intention, and (3) even corrupted human aspirations—when redeemed by grace—become tributaries flowing into the river of God's glory. The preservation of these names in Numbers reveals not human merit but divine strategy: God is building a worship that spans cultures, redeems shadows, and ultimately magnifies His grace by transforming the weak, the lost, and the misdirected into a chorus of eternal adoration.

I. The Primacy of Heart Worship Over External Forms

A. Baal-Theophoric Names in Covenant Leadership

The clearest evidence for acceptance of pagan theophoric elements appears in names incorporating *Baal* (בַּעַל), the Canaanite storm deity. First Chronicles 8:33–34 records **Ishbaal** (יִשְׁבָּעַל, "Man of Baal"), son of Saul, and **Meribbaal** (מְרִיב בַּעַל, "Baal contends"), son of Jonathan, as covenant heirs within Israel's royal genealogy. The Chronicler, writing post-exilic (ca. 4th century BCE) with heightened concern for cultic purity, preserves these forms without condemnation. This indicates acceptance: their covenant standing depended on heart fidelity, not etymological purity.

The parallel accounts in 2 Samuel alter these to **Ishbosheth** and **Mephibosheth**, substituting *bosheth* ("shame") for *Baal*. Conservative evangelical scholarship (Gleason Archer, Walter Kaiser) interprets this not as scribal squeamishness but as providentially-guided clarification for audiences whose context had shifted. By the exilic period, *Baal* had become inextricably linked with syncretistic worship (1 Kings 18; Hosea 2:16–17). The substitution represents dynamic equivalence: preserving historical facts while preventing misunderstanding, ensuring the text advances true worship rather than external confusion.

Archaeological evidence confirms this pattern. The 2015 Khirbet Qeiyafa ostracon and Samaria ostraca (8th century BCE) contain Baal-compound names in administrative contexts, demonstrating elite acceptance before later reforms. These names were normative, not anomalous.

The theological principle aligns with 1 Samuel 16:7: "The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." Ishbaal and Meribbaal serve as legitimate heirs because their internal worship—not their names—defines their standing. This anticipates Jesus' critique in Matthew 23:23–24, where Pharisaic focus on external observance obscures justice and mercy—the weightier matters of worship.

Critically, the converse is equally true: Yahwist theophoric names provide no guarantee of godliness. The wilderness generation of Numbers bore predominantly Yahwist or neutral names—Elizur ("My God is a rock," Numbers 1:5), Shelumiel ("God is peace," Numbers 1:6), Eliasaph ("God has added," Numbers 1:14)—yet God was profoundly displeased with them. Numbers 14:22-23 records His judgment: "None of the men who have seen my glory... shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers." Despite proper nomenclature, their hearts harbored unbelief and rebellion (Numbers 14:11; Hebrews 3:19).

This demonstrates the natural bent of perverse human hearts: we fix the "easy stuff"—external forms, names, rituals—while leaving the poisonous root of unbelief and self-reliance intact. A man named Nathanael ("Gift of God") can be faithless; a man named Ahira ("My brother is Ra") can lead in covenant service. The pattern cuts both ways, establishing the primacy of heart worship over nomenclature from both directions. Pagan names don't disqualify when hearts are aligned; Yahwist names don't justify when hearts rebel. The Father seeks worshipers in spirit and truth (John 4:23)—the name is incidental.

B. Gad and Ahira: Tribal Leaders Without Rebuke

Gad (גָּד), the tribal patriarch, receives his name from Leah's exclamation "Good fortune has come!" (Genesis 30:11). The Hebrew *gad* corresponds directly to the Canaanite deity of fortune, attested in Ugaritic inscriptions and condemned in Isaiah 65:11. Yet the tribe of Gad receives full territorial inheritance east of the Jordan (Numbers 32:1–33; Joshua 13:24–28) and participates in conquest narratives without textual disqualification. The name's pagan etymology does not compromise covenant status.

Ahira (אֲחִירַע), prince of Naphtali, combines ʾaḥi ("my brother") with *Ra* (רע), the Canaanite high god associated with storm and protection. Ahira leads his tribe's census (Numbers 1:42–43) and presents offerings at tabernacle dedication (Numbers 7:78, 83). His prominence in wilderness leadership (second year post-Exodus) demonstrates that such names were normative among tribal heads. No textual evidence suggests controversy regarding his service.

These examples establish a pattern: pagan theophoric elements do not disqualify individuals from worship leadership when hearts align with YHWH. External nomenclature is incidental to the Father's search for true worshipers (John 4:23).

II. Cultural Diversity as Integral to Worship

A. Place Names Preserved Under Covenant Administration

The retention of toponyms honoring foreign deities demonstrates God's valuation of cultural diversity within worship. **Ashtaroth** (עַשְׁתָּרוֹת), named for the Canaanite fertility goddess Astarte, appears in multiple contexts:

1. **Ashtaroth-Karnaim** (Genesis 14:5): Mentioned in Abraham's rescue of Lot, preserved in patriarchal narratives.
2. **Ashtaroth** (Deuteronomy 1:4; Joshua 12:4): Capital of King Og, later allocated to Manasseh (Joshua 13:12) without renaming.
3. **Beth-Ashtaroth** (Joshua 13:12): Literally "House of Astarte," assigned as territory despite obvious cultic origins.

The Mesha Stele (9th century BCE) confirms Israelite control over related sites like **Ataroth** (עֲטָרוֹת), demonstrating sustained occupation of territories bearing pagan toponyms. This contrasts with Jericho's complete destruction and curse (Joshua 6:24–26), suggesting that God permits cultural elements to persist

when sites can be redeemed for covenant purposes rather than requiring wholesale erasure.

B. Eschatological Vision of Diverse Worship

This preservation anticipates Revelation 21:24–26: "The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations." Isaiah 2:2–4 similarly envisions nations streaming to Zion, each bearing distinct cultural offerings. God does not design worship as cultural uniformity but as diverse harmonization.

Significantly, this eschatological vision suggests that the memory of pagan origins will not be erased but redeemed as perpetual testimony to grace. In the ages to come, when redeemed nations bring their glory into the New Jerusalem, the knowledge that their ancestors bore names invoking Baal, Ra, or Astarte—that their cities were once dedicated to false gods—will magnify rather than diminish worship. These memories become permanent witnesses to the magnitude of God's transforming power. The greater the distance traveled, the more resplendent the grace appears. What was once shame becomes trophy; what was once residue becomes reminder. The pagan toponyms and theophoric elements preserved in Scripture foreshadow this pattern: they are not embarrassments to be forgotten but monuments to mercy that will echo through eternity.

The practical implication follows Acts 15:19–20, where the Jerusalem Council grants cultural liberty to Gentile believers. Just as Israel retained Canaanite-influenced names and Ashtaroth-derived place names, the church should permit cultural expressions in worship that do not compromise theological fidelity. Cultural forms—whether African rhythms, Asian liturgical styles, or indigenous expressions—serve as vessels for glory's entry when directed toward the one true God.

God has sovereignly determined that He desires worship expressed through cultural diversity. The retention of pagan toponyms in Scripture demonstrates this principle operating even in Old Covenant contexts.

III. Aspirational Longing as Prerequisite for Worship

A. The Universal Impulse Toward the Divine: Created Restlessness Corrupted by Sin

True worship requires belief that something of exceeding value exists and is worthy of adoration. The pagan theophoric names in Scripture encode universal human aspirations—for protection, order, providence—that church fathers and Reformers identified as evidence of humanity's creational design for God. Augustine's *Confessions* (I.i.1) captures this: "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." This restlessness explains the ubiquity of religious expression across cultures, yet Augustine immediately clarifies that sin has fatally misdirected it: "I sought you outside myself, and found you not" (*Confessions* III.i). The impulse is God-given; the trajectory is corrupted.

Calvin later systematized this as the *sensus divinitatis*. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin writes: "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity... this is

not a doctrine which is first learned at school, but one as to which every man is, from the womb, his own master" (I.iii.1). This innate sense, though indelibly engraved on the human heart, is thoroughly corrupted by sin. Romans 1:21-23 describes the trajectory: though humanity knew God through creation, "they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened... they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images." The *sensus divinitatis* persists—humanity cannot fully extinguish the knowledge of God—but sin suppresses and misdirects it into idolatry. Romans 3:11 makes this explicit: "No one understands; no one seeks God." Apart from divine initiative, the religious impulse becomes self-serving distortion rather than genuine seeking.

Ahira's Ra represents the desire for divine protection against chaos, paralleled in Baal's Ugaritic battles against Sea (Yam). **Gad** embodies hope for providential fortune against uncertainty. **Jerubbaal** (Judges 6:32), meaning "Let Baal contend," retains the storm-god's warrior echo even as Gideon's victories (Judges 7–8) redirect it toward YHWH. These aspirations reflect not human merit but the *imago Dei* with its intent unrealized (Genesis 1:27). Augustine describes such pagan devotion as "fruitless joys" (*Confessions* I.xiv)—shadows of true worship that Augustine himself pursued in his youth through Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism before grace redirected him. Calvin echoes this: the "seed of religion" remains "indelibly engraved on the human heart," yet sinful humanity "corrupts his worship in innumerable ways," turning this implanted awareness into "monster minds" that use "the seed of Deity deposited in human nature as a means of suppressing the name of God" (*Institutes* I.iv.1).

Scripture preserves these pagan names not as commendations of pagan piety but as testimonies to Romans 1:20: God's "invisible attributes... have been clearly perceived... in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse." Augustine argues in *The City of God* (X.3) that pagans "know what God is" through creation yet refuse proper worship, rendering them culpable. The yearning is real—God planted it—but the object is wrong, leaving humanity in the "dissatisfaction" of chasing created things instead of the Creator. This renders these aspirations evidence of divine witness (what Augustine calls God's universal provision of "signs" through creation) yet simultaneously evidence of human guilt. Paul exemplifies this interpretation in Acts 17:22-23: he does not praise Athenian religiosity as virtuous but leverages it as evidence of the very ignorance it represents ("this... you worship as unknown").

B. Fulfillment in YHWH's Supremacy Through Regenerating Grace

The biblical pattern is not erasure but fulfillment—yet a fulfillment that requires divine intervention, not human effort. Psalm 29 deliberately employs Baal-cycle imagery—"the voice of the LORD breaks the cedars" (v. 5), "the LORD sits enthroned over the flood" (v. 10)—to assert YHWH's supremacy over forces Baal only symbolized. Jesus' calming of the storm (Mark 4:35–41) represents ultimate fulfillment: the disciples' question, "Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?" echoes Canaanite longing now answered in YHWH incarnate.

Augustine's conversion narrative in *Confessions* illustrates this pattern. His early yearnings—pursuit of wisdom through Cicero's *Hortensius* (III.iv), Neo-Platonic contemplation of divine forms (VII.ix)—reflected authentic restlessness for transcendence. Yet Augustine emphasizes these remained "fruitless" until God's sovereign intervention: "You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer sought... the things of this world" (VIII.xii). His philosophical "seeking" was preparatory witness to God's existence (Romans 1:20) but salvifically impotent without grace "preventing" him (the Latin *praevenire*, meaning

"going before") through Monica's prayers and Ambrose's preaching. The aspiration was real; only regeneration made it fruitful.

Babylonian theophoric elements illustrate this redemptive pattern. Post-exilic officials bear names like **Nebuzaradan** (נְבוּזַרְאֲדָן, "Nebo has given seed") and **Nebushazban** (נְבוּשַׁזְבָּן, "Nebo has saved"), invoking the Mesopotamian god of wisdom. Yet Jeremiah records them neutrally (Jeremiah 39:9, 13), even portraying Nebuzaradan as recognizing YHWH's sovereignty (Jeremiah 40:2–3). The aspiration for divine wisdom—encoded in Nebo's name—is valid; YHWH redirects it to its proper object, demonstrating that even pagan officials can function as unwitting instruments of providence.[^1]

[^1]: **Moses and the Egyptian-Hebrew Wordplay**: The name Moses (מֹשֶׁה, *mōšeh*) provides another compelling example of God's redemptive strategy with pagan nomenclature. Exodus 2:10 explicitly links the name to Hebrew מָשָׁה (*māšāh*, "to draw out"): "She named him Moses because, she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'" From a conservative evangelical perspective that affirms biblical inerrancy, this statement stands as sober historical testimony. Pharaoh's daughter, as an Egyptian royal, would naturally have given an authentically Egyptian name rooted in the *msy* formula ("born of" + deity, as in Thutmose = "born of Thoth" or Ahmose = "born of Iah"). The Late Bronze Age Nile Delta was multilingual—Canaanite (Northwest Semitic, ancestral to Hebrew) functioned as a language of trade and commerce throughout the Near East, with large subjugated populations using it. The Amarna Letters (ca. 1350 BCE) document Egyptian pharaohs' exchanges with Canaanite vassals, showing that courts routinely engaged Semitic languages for governance. Egyptian royals overseeing Delta estates would encounter Canaanite through servants, merchants, and attendants—much as Roman elites navigated Greek for administration (Acts 21:37-40). God providentially orchestrated phonetic overlap between Egyptian *msy* and Hebrew *māšāh*, and the Hebrew wordplay was likely pointed out to Pharaoh's daughter by Semitic-speaking attendants like Miriam (Exodus 2:4-8), turning an act of rescue into prophetic foreshadowing. The Egyptian-rooted name becomes the vehicle for plagues that mock Egyptian deities (Exodus 7-12)—Hapi humiliated by blood, Ra defeated by darkness, Osiris overcome by death of firstborn. Moses' transformation from Egyptian prince to covenant mediator exemplifies the pattern: pagan-influenced nomenclature redeemed to serve YHWH's purposes, magnifying grace by the distance traveled. For fuller discussion, see Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents* (2001), and Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (1994), pp. 127-129.

C. Paul's Paradigm: God's Initiative in Redirecting Worship

Paul's voyage to Rome on a ship bearing **Castor and Pollux** (Acts 28:11), patron deities of sailors, receives no condemnation. Luke records this detail matter-of-factly, and Paul credits survival to God's providence (Acts 27:23–24) rather than demanding removal of pagan symbols. This demonstrates apostolic willingness to function within cultural contexts bearing pagan elements, prioritizing missional engagement over symbolic purity.

The theological principle: humanity's aspirational impulse toward the divine—even when corrupted into idolatry—testifies to the *sensus divinitatis* that God planted. Yet Calvin emphasizes that this seed "never so dies or perishes in us" but remains suppressed and distorted until the Holy Spirit restores it through regeneration (*Institutes* I.iii.1). Paul does not stamp out religious aspiration in Athens (Acts 17:23); he announces that God, who previously "overlooked" times of ignorance, "now commands all people

everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). The aspiration was God-given; the object was fatally wrong; the solution is divine initiative, not human seeking.

This Reformed understanding prevents misreading pagan names as evidence of human merit. Acts 17:27 states that God arranged nations "that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him"—yet the same passage clarifies this seeking occurs only because "in him we live and move and have our being" (v. 28). God's sustaining presence makes the search possible, but Romans 3:11 reminds us the unregenerate never complete it: "no one seeks God." The highest pagan conception of deity is indeed a shadow compared to Scripture's revelation. We must take care not to extinguish the aspiration itself, for God planted it as a universal witness (Romans 1:20), but we must equally refuse to credit it as salvific initiative. It is prevenient revelation, not prevenient grace—evidence that leaves humanity "without excuse" (Romans 1:20) rather than merit that earns salvation.

What Scripture preserves in names like Ahira, Gad, and the Babylonian Nebo-officials is not commendable piety but the raw material of divine pedagogy: God meeting fallen mankind where he is, using even their misdirected worship as starting points for gospel proclamation (Acts 17:23). The seed exists, but only regeneration makes it fruitful.

Conclusion: The Magnificence of Worship Redeemed

The acceptance of pagan theophoric elements in biblical onomastics reveals God's sovereign strategy for attaining the worship He seeks. When Jesus declares in John 4:23 that "the Father is seeking such to worship him in spirit and truth," He unveils God's ultimate purpose: not merely to be acknowledged, but to be *worshiped*—and worshiped magnificently, by a multitude no one can number, from every nation and tribe (Revelation 7:9).

The divine genius displayed in preserving names like Ahira, Gad, and Jerubbaal, and places like Ashtaroth and Ataroth, demonstrates God's redemptive calculus: He meets mankind in his fallenness, takes their misdirected yearnings—however corrupted—and transforms them by grace into authentic adoration. Where human hearts once cried out to Ra for protection, to Gad for fortune, to Baal for order, they now discover these longings fulfilled infinitely in YHWH. The same restlessness that drove Augustine through Manichaeism and Neo-Platonism, the same *sensus divinitatis* that Calvin saw expressed even in "grossest idolatry," becomes—through regenerating grace—the very capacity for worship that glorifies God.

This is not human seeking finding its reward; it is divine seeking achieving its goal. Romans 3:11 reminds us that "no one seeks God"—yet God seeks worshipers (John 4:23). The profundity lies here: by redeeming the weak, the lost, the idolatrous—by taking hearts that chased shadows and turning them toward the Light—God maximizes His own glory. Every converted pagan aspiration becomes a trophy of grace. Every cultural stream flowing into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:24–26) magnifies the scope of His redemption. The eschatological vision is not of cultural uniformity but of kaleidoscopic diversity, all oriented toward one throne, all proclaiming one Name.

Consider the trajectory from Numbers 1 to Revelation 7: Ahira leads Naphtali's census in the wilderness, his name whispering "My brother is Ra." Centuries pass. Empires rise and fall. The gospel advances. And finally, from Naphtali's descendants—from among those who bore pagan-tinged names, who inherited

Canaanite-named territories, who lived amid the cultural residue of false gods—worshipers emerge. Not because they sought God, but because God sought them. Their corrupted religious impulses, once directed toward storm-gods and fertility deities, have been purified, redirected, fulfilled. And now they stand, palm branches in hand, crying "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:10).

And even in eternity, the memory remains—not as shame, but as monument. When Naphtali's redeemed worship before the throne in ages to come, they will remember: our forefather bore the name of Ra, the storm-lord. Our territory was dotted with Ashtaroth's shrines. We were as pagan as the nations around us. Yet God sought us, redeemed us, transformed us. The memory of how far grace traveled—from "My brother is Ra" to "Salvation belongs to our God"—will magnify worship forever. Every redeemed nation will carry such memories into the New Jerusalem, and these memories will not diminish but amplify their adoration, for they testify that salvation belongs to God alone, who redeems the weak, the lost, and the misdirected.

This is worship maximized: not a remnant scraped from ruins, but nations streaming in; not individuals extracted from their cultures, but cultures redeemed and brought as offerings; not suppressed yearnings, but yearnings transformed. Augustine's restless heart finds rest. Calvin's *semen religionis* bears fruit. The pagan farmer who named his son after Ra's protection discovers the true Brother who calms storms. The tribe of Gad learns that fortune is providence. The worshipers of Nebo find wisdom incarnate. Every shadow points to substance. Every groping finds the Hand that was always reaching back.

God's glory is magnified precisely *because* He redeems the misdirected. The greater the distance from which He draws worshipers—from Baal-worship to YHWH-adoration, from Egyptian pantheons to the One enthroned in Zion, from Athenian altars to "the unknown God" revealed—the more resplendent His grace appears. The presence of pagan theophoric elements in Scripture is not incidental; it is testimonial. It declares: "Here were hearts made for worship, yet worshiping wrongly—and God redeemed them."

In the end, the magnitude of God's glory corresponds to the magnitude of transformation He accomplishes. A billion voices all singing the same song might sound impressive; but a billion voices, each from cultures that once worshiped false gods, now united in truth yet diverse in expression, all proclaiming *sola gratia* because none sought Him first—this is worship that shakes the cosmos. This is the Father's goal achieved: worship in spirit and truth, from every tongue, all testifying that salvation—and the yearning that preceded it—belongs to God alone.

The arid lists of Numbers thus become prophetic. In Ahira's name we glimpse Naphtali's future worship. In Gad's inheritance we see providence preparing a stage. In Ashtaroth's stones we perceive foundations for the temple of living stones to come. God wastes nothing. He redeems shadows. He transforms the weak into worshipers. And when the final chorus swells, every voice that once cried to Baal or Ra or Nebo will instead cry "Holy, holy, holy"—and the glory will be His alone, magnified eternally by the grace that brought the lost home. *Soli Deo Gloria*.

Footnotes

1. Moses and the Egyptian-Hebrew Wordplay: The name Moses (מֹשֶׁה, *mōšeh*) provides another compelling example of God's redemptive strategy with pagan nomenclature. Exodus 2:10 explicitly links the name to Hebrew מָשָׁה (*māšāh*, "to draw out"): "She named him Moses because, she said, 'I drew him out of the water.'" From a conservative evangelical perspective that affirms biblical inerrancy, this statement stands as sober historical testimony. Pharaoh's daughter, as an Egyptian royal, would naturally have given an authentically Egyptian name rooted in the *msy* formula ("born of" + deity, as in Thutmose = "born of Thoth" or Ahmose = "born of Iah"). The Late Bronze Age Nile Delta was multilingual—Canaanite (Northwest Semitic, ancestral to Hebrew) functioned as a language of trade and commerce throughout the Near East, with large subjugated populations using it. The Amarna Letters (ca. 1350 BCE) document Egyptian pharaohs' exchanges with Canaanite vassals, showing that courts routinely engaged Semitic languages for governance. Egyptian royals overseeing Delta estates would encounter Canaanite through servants, merchants, and attendants—much as Roman elites navigated Greek for administration (Acts 21:37-40). God providentially orchestrated phonetic overlap between Egyptian *msy* and Hebrew *māšāh*, and the Hebrew wordplay was likely pointed out to Pharaoh's daughter by Semitic-speaking attendants like Miriam (Exodus 2:4-8), turning an act of rescue into prophetic foreshadowing. The Egyptian-rooted name becomes the vehicle for plagues that mock Egyptian deities (Exodus 7-12)—Hapi humiliated by blood, Ra defeated by darkness, Osiris overcome by death of firstborn. Moses' transformation from Egyptian prince to covenant mediator exemplifies the pattern: pagan-influenced nomenclature redeemed to serve YHWH's purposes, magnifying grace by the distance traveled. For fuller discussion, see Walter C. Kaiser, *The Old Testament Documents* (2001), and Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (1994), pp. 127-129.

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