

The כִּי Clause in Exodus 19:5c and its Significance for an Old Testament Mission Theology

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Abstract

Many take Exodus 19:3-6 to set out the uniqueness of Israel's relationship with God (v. 5ab) and the particular role and responsibility Israel has in relation to the rest of the world (v. 6). This raises an important question. Was choosing Israel God's main priority, or was his intention, from the start, to redeem the whole world, with the choice of Israel part of that wider purpose? This article argues that the translation of the clause in verse 5c, introduced by the Hebrew particle כִּי (*ki*), is relevant to that discussion. In the context of the use of כִּי in the wider OT, it discusses the main interpretations of the כִּי clause in Exodus 19:5c – asseverative, causal, concessive, and explanatory. It concludes in favour of a causal understanding and points to the implications for an understanding of the mission theology of the OT.

1. Introduction

Exodus 19:3-6 is important in setting out the uniqueness of Israel's relationship with God ('out of all nations you will be my treasured possession')¹ and also, in my view, the particular role and responsibility the people have in relation to the rest of the world ('you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation').²

1. Unless otherwise stated all biblical references are from the NIV (Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide).

2. There are different opinions, particularly over the significance of the expression 'kingdom of priests'. This will be discussed in more detail below.

What, though, is the purpose lying behind God's choice of Israel? Is it part of God's intention to choose, set apart, and redeem a particular group of people who would enjoy a close relationship with him, albeit with a responsibility to the rest of the world and with the possibility of others being drawn into the same relationship? Or does it have a wider significance, suggesting that God's prior commitment is to the whole world, and the choice of a particular people, rather than being an end in itself, is a means to redeem and restore a fallen creation? In that case, Israel was chosen both to model the relationship that God intended for all peoples from the start, and to play a part in bringing those other peoples to him. To put the question another way: was God's main priority to choose, set apart, and redeem Israel, and that relationship was later extended to include those from the rest of the world who chose to be part of it, or was his overriding priority, from the start, to redeem the whole world, and the choice of Israel was part of the working out of that wider purpose? In my view, the latter seems more likely: the choice of a special people was not an end in itself, but a means of fulfilling the divine commitment to the whole of the created order.³ It is not my purpose here to rehearse those wider arguments in detail. I do, though, want to consider the translation of the כִּי (ki) clause in Exodus 19:5 – כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ (ki li kol ha'arets) – and its relevance to that discussion.

The significant term in this clause, and the main focus of this discussion is כִּי. This is one of the most common, but also one of the most notorious, particles in the OT. It occurs almost 4,500 times, and functions in a large variety

3. Goldingay suggests that 'creation looks forward to the covenant, but the covenant serves creation'. See John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology, Volume 1: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), 100–101 (101); see also Terence E. Fretheim, 'The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus', *Interpretation* 45.4 (1991): 354–365, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430004500403>; "'Because the Whole Earth is Mine": Theme and Narrative in Exodus', *Interpretation* 50.3 (1996): 229–239, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439605000302>; *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 128–129; James Chukwuma Okoye, *Israel and the Nations: A Mission Theology of the Old Testament* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1970), 56–64 (64); Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 319–325; 'Mission and Covenant in the Old Testament', in *Bible and Mission: A Conversation Between Biblical Studies and Missiology*, ed. Rollin G. Grams et al. (Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag 2008), 8–41; 'Creation and Covenant: God's Direct Relationship with the Non-Israelite Nations in the Old Testament', in *Interreligious Relationships: Biblical Perspectives*, ed. Hallvard Hagelia and Markus Zehnder (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 52–69; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 263–264.

of ways. Because of its frequency and the range of uses, *ki* has been the subject of a great deal of discussion.⁴ And, while it is beyond the remit of this article to set out in detail the wider scope and significance of *ki*, it is important to note some aspects of that more general discussion.

2. Functions of כִּי in the OT

Muilenberg suggests that the original use of כִּי was as an emphatic particle. He notes, too, that it is deictic, drawing the reader's attention to what comes next.⁵ However, in his view, while retaining something of its basic demonstrative, emphatic character, its usage has developed to include a wide range of functions and nuances. Because of this diversity, Muilenberg focuses on how כִּי is used rhetorically. Schoors, too, suggests that כִּי was, originally, deictic, or demonstrative. He highlights its asseverative and emphatic use in the OT,⁶ though also points to its wider usage. Follingstad argues for the primacy of the deictic function of כִּי and whilst it may be nuanced pragmatically, 'the core function of כִּי is the same throughout all its contexts'.⁷ More recent studies, notably by Bandstra and Locatell, have questioned the emphatic use of כִּי.⁸ And

4. See for example (in order of publication) James Muilenberg, 'The Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages of the Particle כִּי in the Old Testament', *HUCA* 32 (1961): 142–149; A. Schoors, 'The Particle כִּי', in *Remembering All the Way: A Collection of Old Testament Studies Published on the Occasion of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland*, ed. B. Albrektson (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 240–276, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004494039_017; Barry Bandstra, 'The Syntax of Particle "ky" in Biblical Hebrew and Ugaritic' (PhD Diss., Yale University, 1982); Anneli Aejmelaeus, 'The Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew', *JBL* 105.2 (1986): 193–209, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3260389>; C. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint in Biblical Hebrew Text: A Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Analysis of the Particle כִּי* (Dallas: SIL International, 2001); Christian Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy in the Hebrew Bible: A Cognitive Linguistic Approach to כִּי* (PhD Diss., Stellenbosch University, 2017). See also, Esias E. Meyer, 'The Particle כִּי: A Mere Conjunction or Something More?', *JNSL* 27.1 (2001): 39–62; Christian Locatell, 'Causal Categories in Biblical Hebrew Discourse: A Cognitive Approach to Causal כִּי', *JNSL* 45.2 (2019): 79–102; 'Temporal Conjunctions and Their Semantic Extensions: The Case of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew', *JSS* 65.1 (2020): 93–115, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgz040>.

5. Muilenberg, 'Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages', 136; see also Aejmelaeus, 'Function and Interpretation', 195.

6. Schoors, 'Particle כִּי', 242–253.

7. Follingstad, *Deictic Viewpoint*, 320. So, whilst a כִּי clause as a whole may have a causal sense, determined by the context, the term כִּי, itself, has no inherent causal meaning.

8. Bandstra, *Syntax of Particle ky*, 25–53 and passim; Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 275–276; see also Aejmelaeus, 'Function and Interpretation', 205; Walter T. Claassen,

Locatell, in his discussion of the polysemous function of terms, including כִּי, further challenges the view that its original sense carries through into all its subsequent uses.⁹ The emphatic aspect is, though, included in most lists of the way כִּי is interpreted.

In order to determine a basis for the polysemy of כִּי that is not simply determined by context, Locatell analyses the possible diachronic development of the term. He suggests that, rather than an original emphatic meaning, the ‘most likely source of כִּי was as a modal preposition of comparison’.¹⁰ And he notes, too, the significance of the temporal use of כִּי in the development, particularly, of its causal and conditional functions.¹¹

Notwithstanding arguments to the contrary, discussions of כִּי in the OT include most or all of the following range of uses.¹² It may, as noted, have a temporal function (‘when’).¹³ It may express a condition (‘if’),¹⁴ or be used as an adversative (e.g. ‘but’).¹⁵ A common function of כִּי is as a conjunction

‘Speaker-Orientated Functions of *ki* in Biblical Hebrew’, *JNSL* 11 (1983): 29–46.

9. Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 114–118. See also Aejmelaeus, ‘Function and Interpretation’, 195–196; Christo H. J. van der Merwe, ‘Biblical Hebrew and Cognitive Linguistics: A General Orientation’, in *New Perspectives in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew*, Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 7, ed. Aaron D. Hornkohl and Geoffrey Khan (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021), 671 n69, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0250.21>; Christian Locatell, ‘Polysemous Adverbial Conjunctions in Biblical Hebrew: An Application of Diachronic Semantic Maps’, in *New Perspectives in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew*, Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 7, ed. Aaron D. Hornkohl and Geoffrey Khan (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2021), 575–578, 596–604, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0250.19>.

10. Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 279.

11. See also Locatell, ‘Temporal Conjunctions’.

12. This is a brief summary. For more detailed analysis, see sources above, footnote 4. See also Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 149–155, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781139939591>; John C. Beckman, ‘Concessive Clause: Biblical Hebrew’, in *Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* 1, 537–540; ‘Conditional Clause: Biblical Hebrew’, in *Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* 1, 545–548; Allan Harman, ‘Particles’, *NIDOTTE* 4: 1028–1041; Robert Holmstedt, ‘Hypotaxis’, in *Encyclopaedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics* 2, 220–222; Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, SubBi 27, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), esp. 581–604.

13. E.g. Hos 11:1 – ‘when (כִּי) Israel was a child, I loved him’.

14. E.g. Exod 22:5,6,7,10 – ‘If (כִּי) anyone ...’ Though some of such instances may have a causal sense; see, e.g. Peter Goeman, ‘Towards a New Proposal for Translating the Conjunction כִּי in Deuteronomy 4.29’, *The Bible Translator* 71.2 (2020): 158–178, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2051677020918633>.

15. E.g. Gen 24:3–4 – ‘you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites ... but (כִּי) will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my

introducing nominal clauses (e.g. ‘that’),¹⁶ including clauses following verbs of perception,¹⁷ direct speech (often without being translated),¹⁸ and oaths.¹⁹ It is widely agreed that כִּי occurs most frequently in causal or explicative clauses,²⁰ where it is often translated ‘because’ or ‘for’. These causal כִּי clauses generally give the reason for the situation or the motive for the action described in the main clause. Locatell suggests four domains in which these clauses occur: speech-act, metalinguistic, epistemic and content.²¹ In the first, ‘the causal clause provides the grounds for the speech-act performed in the main clause’.²² In the *metalinguistic domain*, the כִּי clause explains the form of language, the terms used or idea(s) expressed in the main clause.²³ In the *epistemic domain* the כִּי clause contains the basis for the knowledge or understanding expressed in the main clause.²⁴ Finally, in the *content domain*, the כִּי clause relates more

son Isaac’.

16. E.g. Ps 8:5 – ‘what is mankind that (כִּי) you are mindful of them, and human beings that (כִּי) you care for them’. For further discussion on the nominalising function of כִּי and its relation to its asseverative use, see Grace J. Park, ‘Stand-Alone Nominalizations Formed with *’āšer* and *kî* in Biblical Hebrew’, *JSS* 61.1 (2016): 41–65, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1093/jss/fgv030>.

17. E.g. Gen 1:10,12,18 – ‘And God saw that (כִּי) it was good’; Gen 8:11 – ‘Then Noah knew that (כִּי) the waters had receded from the earth.’

18. E.g. Exod 3:12 – ‘And God said (כִּי – untranslated) “I will be with you.”’

19. E.g. Gen 22:16–17 – ‘because you have done this ... (כִּי – untranslated) I will surely bless you’. This is sometimes taken to be an example of the asseverative use of כִּי; however, see Bandstra, *Syntax*, 142; Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 267–268.

20. Locatell suggests a relatively unambiguous causal function of כִּי in 164 of its 290 occurrences in Genesis (i.e. 57%) (‘Causal Categories’, 86). Bandstra suggests a figure of 536 out of 1037 occurrences in the Pentateuch (52%) and 318 out of 443 occurrences in the Psalms (72%) (*Syntax*, 159, 410).

21. Locatell, ‘Causal Categories’; see also *Grammatical Polysemy*, 160–189.

22. Locatell, ‘Causal Categories’, 86. E.g. in Gen 6:13 – ‘So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for (כִּי) the earth is filled with violence because of them”’ – the כִּי clause gives the reason for God’s illocutionary act ‘to put an end to all people’.

23. E.g. in Gen 17:5 – ‘No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for (כִּי) I have made you a father of many nations’, the כִּי clause could give the reason for the speech-act whereby Yahweh gives a new name to the patriarch, or it could also be linked, metalinguistically, to the term ‘Abraham’, explaining why that particular name is given. In Gen 29:9 – ‘While [Jacob] was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for (כִּי) she was a shepherd’ – the כִּי clause gives the rationale for the reference to Rachel coming ‘with her father’s sheep’.

24. E.g. in Gen 28:36 – ‘Judah recognised them and said, “She [Tamar] is more righteous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah”’ – the כִּי clause points to Judah’s shortcomings and provides the basis for the assertion ‘she is more righteous than I’.

objectively to the main clause; it ‘marks a causal relationship between states of affairs construed as external to the speech interaction ground’.²⁵ In the large majority of cases causal **כִּי** clauses follow the main clause.²⁶ Exceptions, where the causal **כִּי** clause precedes the main clause,²⁷ may maintain the continuity of the discourse,²⁸ or emphasise a certain topic.²⁹ Another function of **כִּי** is in concessive clauses (generally translated ‘though’, ‘even though’, ‘even if’ or ‘although’). Concession is often indicated by **כִּי אַם** (*gam ki*),³⁰ though clauses with **כִּי** alone may be interpreted in the same way.³¹ Aejmelaeus is cautious regarding the concessive use of **כִּי**, suggesting that in many cases these clauses may be viewed as conditional or causal.³² Bandstra and Locatell, though, identify several instances where a concessive interpretation appears to be the most likely.³³ Concessive **כִּי** clauses generally appear before the main clause.³⁴ Bandstra also notes instances where the clause appears to be parenthetic with an explanatory function, and on those occasions occurs after the main clause.³⁵ Such explanatory clauses, though, may come within the orbit of metalinguistic causal **כִּי**.³⁶ Finally, as noted already, **כִּי** is frequently given an asseverative or

25. Locatell, ‘Causal Categories’, 93. E.g. Gen 2:3 – ‘Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because (**כִּי**) on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.’

26. Bandstra notes that causal **כִּי** clauses occur after the main clause in 95% of case (*Syntax*, 159); see also, e.g. Locatell, ‘Causal Categories’, 84; Aejmelaeus, ‘Function and Interpretation’, 196–198.

27. E.g. Gen 3:14,17; Ps 91:4; Isa 3:16–17.

28. Locatell, ‘Causal Categories’, 88.

29. Bandstra, *Syntax*, 159–161.

30. E.g. Ps 23:4; Prov 22:6; Isa 1:15; Lam 3:8; Hos 9:16.

31. E.g. Gen 31:37 – ‘Although (**כִּי**) you have felt about through all my goods ...’ (NRSV); Ps 23:4 – ‘Even though (**כִּי**) I walk through the darkest valley ...’

32. Aejmelaeus, ‘Function and Interpretation’, 198–199, 205–207.

33. Bandstra, *Syntax*, 129–133; Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 256–257.

34. Bandstra, *Syntax*, 16–17; Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 257.

35. Bandstra, *Syntax*, 129–130.

36. As an example, Bandstra cites Exod 13:17 – ‘When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though (**כִּי**) that was shorter.’ That seems a natural translation, and it is adopted by most English translations. However, the explanation given in the **כִּי** clause could relate, not to the whole of the previous clause, but to the route the Israelites might have taken, and in that case, a causal interpretation seems plausible; they might have been expected to go that way ‘because it was shorter’. Cf. Aejmelaeus, ‘Function and Interpretation’, 206–207. Hamilton suggests that the clause may be read as concessive or causal; see Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 205. Other examples (Ps 96:5; Deut 4:15) are, in my view, even less convincing.

emphatic sense. Muilenberg notes its use in emphatic statements,³⁷ and in ‘the introduction to climactic divine self-asseverations’.³⁸ In this context, Schoors suggests that it may be translated ‘yea, surely, certainly’,³⁹ or, for stylistic reasons, remain untranslated. In more recent translations, asseverative כִּי is usually rendered ‘indeed, surely’.⁴⁰

3. The כִּי Clause in Exodus 19:5c

3.1 Context

The immediate context of the clause is the words spoken by God to Moses in Exodus 19:3–6. As with the whole book, there is debate about the composition of the passage.⁴¹ However, whilst recognising that the passage may be composite, this article focuses, primarily, on the final form of the text.⁴² In line with narrative approaches, it assumes that if the text is edited, the various elements have been brought together for a reason and that each has a purpose in the overall discourse.

In the opening verses of the chapter, the people of Israel, after leaving Egypt, arrived at the desert of Sinai and set up camp in front of the mountain, which, though not specifically named here, is later clearly identified as Mount Sinai (vv. 11, 18, 20). Moses then went up to receive God’s word. That word includes a review of what God has already done for Israel and a call for

37. Muilenberg, ‘Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages’, 145; e.g. Num 23:23.

38. Muilenberg, ‘Linguistic and Rhetorical Usages’, 147; e.g. Exod 20:5b; Isa 43:3a.

39. Schoors, ‘Particle כִּי’, 234–245. A frequently quoted example is Gen 18:20, which Schoors translates ‘Yea [כִּי], the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin surely [כִּי] is very grave.’

40. E.g. Num 14:40 – ‘Surely (כִּי), we have sinned’; 2 Sam 3:36 – ‘All the people took note and were pleased; indeed (כִּי), everything the king did pleased them.’

41. See, e.g. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; London: Apollos, 2017), 335–358; Suzanne Boorer, ‘Source and Redaction Criticism’, in *Methods for Exodus*, *Methods in Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95–130, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511811142.005>; Brevard Childs, *Exodus*, *OTL* (London: SCM, 1974), 340–364, esp. 360–361; Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, *ECC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 438–447; W. Johnstone, *Exodus*, *OTG* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990); Dale Patrick, ‘The Covenant Code Sources’, *VT* 27.2 (1977): 145–157, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853377X00410>.

42. This approach is adopted by, e.g. Alexander, *Exodus*, 358; John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, *JSOTSup* 395 (London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 18–31; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, *WBC* 3 (Waco: Word, 1987), xix–xxiv.

obedience to the demands of the covenant relationship that God is establishing with them.

Closely linked with that call to obedience is Israel's unique place among the nations as God's 'treasured possession', which translates the Hebrew, *סְגֻלָּה* (*segullah*) – 'out of all nations you will be my treasured possession' (v. 5). The same term, referring to God's people, occurs several times in the OT, particularly in Deuteronomy, where, again, God takes Israel to be his *סְגֻלָּה*, 'out of all the peoples on the face of the earth' (Deut 7:6; 14:2; see also Deut 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). On the remaining two occasions where *סְגֻלָּה* appears in the OT it denotes the personal treasure of a king (1 Chr 29:3; Ecc 2:8).⁴³ Israel is frequently referred to as God's people before the statement in Exodus 19:5 (e.g. Exod 3:7,10; 6:7; cf. 4:22-23), and the conditional element here ('if you obey me fully and obey my covenant') is therefore probably best understood, not as setting out an essentially new relationship, but rather, marking a new departure in an already existing relationship, linked with Israel's status in relation to other nations.⁴⁴ There may also be an implicit challenge to Israel to live out that special calling.⁴⁵ However, while I agree with DeRouchie's general position on the significance of the *כִּי* clause, and its significance for Israel's agency among the nations, it seems to be going too far to argue that being God's *סְגֻלָּה* is included as part of the protasis of the condition in verse 5, with the apodosis beginning at verse 6a.⁴⁶ DeRouchie suggests the paraphrase 'If Israel will surely heed his voice and keep his covenant and be a treasured possession – living as if they are valued by God – then they will fulfil their calling as a royal priesthood and holy nation.'⁴⁷ *Living as God's treasured possession* is an important corollary of *being* God's treasured possession, but, in my view, the status comes first. And that seems to be the emphasis of Deuteronomy 26:16-19, which DeRouchie uses to support his position. There, in a mutual declaration of

43. See also, e.g. Michael A. Grisanti, 'The Missing Mandate: Missions in the Old Testament', in *Missions in a New Millennium: Change and Challenges in World Mission*, ed. W. Edward Glenny and William H. Smallman (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2000), 43–68 (esp. 52).

44. E.g. Alexander, *Exodus*, 374–375; Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 213; 'Because the Whole Earth', 233–234; W. D. Johnstone, 'Exodus', in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 102; Patrick, 'The Covenant Code Source', 148–149, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-001a.0011>.

45. E.g. Alexander, *Exodus*, 376–377.

46. Jason S. DeRouchie, 'Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4–6: A Case Study in Exegesis and Theology', *JBTS* 6.1 (2021): 90–95.

47. DeRouchie, 'Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4–6', 94–95.

commitment, which marks the conclusion of covenant, the people set out their aspiration to keep his commands and so live as the treasured possession that God has declared them to be.⁴⁸

Israel's special status is also emphasised in the two designations: *מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים* (*mamleket kohanim*) and *גּוֹי קָדוֹשׁ* (*goy qadosh*). The second, *גּוֹי קָדוֹשׁ* ('holy nation'), implies being set apart, both for God's use and also for the purpose of demonstrating, in their national life, what it means to live as the people of God. Holiness is an important characteristic of God,⁴⁹ and the people who bear his name must reflect his holiness in their life together: 'Be holy, because I the LORD your God, am holy' (Lev 19:2; see also 11:44-45; 20:26). That distinctiveness, here, is directly linked to obedience to the demands of the covenant. The first designation, *מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים*, is variously translated 'kingdom of priests' (NIV, ESV, NASB), 'priestly kingdom' (NRSV) and 'royal priesthood'.⁵⁰ 'Kingdom' points to the domain ruled over by a king and in this case would refer to the whole nation which is ruled over by God. Davies further wants to suggest that Israel has been given royal status, emphasising the special nature of its calling.⁵¹ The reference to 'priests' again points to the status of the nation, suggesting either a kingdom made up of priests or, more likely, as a better parallel to 'holy nation', that the nation as a whole has a priestly character.⁵²

There is some debate about what the designation 'kingdom of priests' means for Israel in this context. One view suggests that the role of priest is

48. So, e.g. Patrick Miller translates Deut 26:18 – 'You have declared to him: Because you wish to be his people, his personal possession, as he has promised you, you will keep all his commandments', *Deuteronomy, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 186; see also, e.g. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976), 324–325, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-009p>. J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2002), 382–383.

49. See, e.g. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 105–106.

50. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 1, 63–86. Hamilton also suggests 'royalty/kingdom of priests' (Exodus, 293). The LXX βασιλειον ιεράτευμα also translates as 'royal priesthood'. The same expression occurs in 1 Pet 2:9, alongside ἅγιος ἄγιον ('holy nation'), which is identical to the LXX in Exod 19:6.

51. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 102.

52. See Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*, JSOTSup 305 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 50–52. Moran argues that these expressions are not parallel, but rather point to two groups which, together, make up the totality of Israel: a holy people and a ruling priesthood exercising royal power; see W. L. Moran, 'A Kingdom of Priests', in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie (New York: Herder & Herder, 1962), 8–20. This though seems unlikely; see, e.g. Davis, *Royal Priesthood*, 77–81.

as an intermediary, as set out in Moses's blessing of Levi: 'He teaches your precepts to Jacob and your law to Israel. He offers incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar' (Deut 33:10). This points, on the one hand, to the priests' special relationship with God, and on the other, to their ministry as God's representatives, within the community. It could be argued that only the High Priest had a fully mediatorial role. He alone was allowed into the Most Holy Place, which was associated with God's Presence, with the blood of sacrifices offered on behalf of the people, albeit in a very limited way.⁵³ And there were serious consequences for those who tried to enter God's presence without his express command.⁵⁴ In relation to the people, the High Priest was entrusted with the Urim and Thummim, as a means of determining God's will (e.g. Exod 28:30). But the wider priesthood also had a supporting, intermediary, role.⁵⁵ They are described as those 'who approach the Lord' (Exod 19:22);⁵⁶ they had access to the 'holy place',⁵⁷ the second most holy part of the tabernacle (Exod 26:33); they received the blood of the people's sacrifices and sprinkled it on the altar (e.g. Lev 1:5, 11; 2 Chr 29:22); they burned incense from the grain offering (e.g. Lev 2:1-2; 6:14-15) and the flesh of burnt offerings (e.g. Lev 1:7-9). In Ezekiel's vision of a restored and renewed temple, God refers to the priests as those who 'come near to me ... who shall enter my sanctuary ... to minister to me' (Ezek 44:15-16),⁵⁸ though this still does not include access to the Most

53. This seems to be restricted to the Day of Atonement (Lev 16; cf. 1 Chr 6:49).

54. E.g. Aaron's sons (Lev 10:1-2); Korah and his followers (Num 16:1-35). In the case of Korah's rebellion, this seems also to do with challenging the authority of Aaron and Moses and the distinction between priests and Levites (cf. Num 16:9-10).

55. According to Malone, 'The priest is in every way an intermediary. The priest's own goal is to bring God and people together'; see Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 43 (London: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP: 2017), 38; see also Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 163, 168; Wells, *God's Holy People*, 63.

56. See Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 98.

57. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus 1-27*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), lvii; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), 90, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-00a7>.

58. The relationship between priests and Levites in Ezek 44 and its place in the development of Israel's priesthood is debated; see, e.g. Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel and the Leaders of Israel*, VTSup 56 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 58-90, <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004275805>; J. G. McConville, 'Priests and Levites in Ezekiel: A Crux in the Interpretation of Israel's History', *TynBul* 34 (1983): 3-31; Nathan MacDonald, *Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44*, BZAW 476 (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110411867>. The distinction between Zadokite priests and Levites reflects a similar distinction, between Levites and Aaronide priests in Num 18, and Allen suggests that vv. 15-16 intends 'to hark back to the pre-exilic period'; see

Holy Place.⁵⁹ And, further reflecting the blessing of Levi, they give instruction: 'they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the common and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean' (Ezek 44:23; cf. Lev 10:10-11). In that sense, then, they also acted as intermediaries: their special relationship with God was the basis of their ministry, on his behalf, among the people. When applied to Israel, the designation 'kingdom of priests' (Exod 19:6) is then taken to imply that the nation, as a whole, is called to function as an intermediary, in this case between God and the rest of the world⁶⁰ – bringing God to the nations so that they, too, may have a relationship with him. Fretheim suggests that Israel 'is to be devoted as a nation to a mediatorial role between God and other kingdoms, to function among the nations as a priest functions in a religious community'.⁶¹

As part of that intermediary role, the priest in Israel might also confer divine blessing on the people (e.g. Lev 9:22; Num 6:23; Deut 21:5; 2 Chr 30:27).⁶² As a priestly nation, Israel may also be seen to bring God's blessing to the

Leslie Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC 29 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 261–262; see also Macdonald, *Priestly Rule*, 41–47. There are parallels, too, between the instruction in Ezek 44:20-27 and Lev 10, 21 (Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 263–264; Macdonald, *Priestly Rule*, 87). Notwithstanding the clear difficulties of the passage, it emphasises the intermediary role of priests, and appears to link this, at least in part, with Pentateuchal traditions; see Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 498–500, <https://doi.org/10.5040/bci-008x>; cf. McConville, 'Priests and Levites', 27–29.

59. E.g. Block, *Ezekiel*, 571; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 97. The omission of a specific reference to the High Priest in these verses seems surprising but is outside the scope of this article (see Block, *Ezekiel*, 637; Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 59–64; Macdonald, *Priestly Rule*, 90–92).

60. E.g. William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 45; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 407; Wright, *Mission of God*, 224–225, 260. See also, e.g. Walter Brueggemann, *Delivered into Covenant. Pivotal Moments in the Book of Exodus, Part 2* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 33; Childs, *Exodus*, 367; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 446; Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 389; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212; Walter C. Kaiser Jr, 'Exodus', in *Expositors Bible Commentary Volume 1*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 473; Malone, *God's Mediators*, 125; Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 98; Carol Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 147; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 423.

61. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212.

62. Blessing also seems to be the priestly function of Melchizedek in Gen 14:18-20; see Robin Routledge, 'Psalm 110, David and Melchizedek', *Baptistic Theologies* 1.2 (2009): 1–16; cf. Malone, *God's Mediators*, 62.

world, and so be the instrument through which God's word to Abraham, that 'all peoples on earth will be blessed through you' (Gen 12:3), will be fulfilled.⁶³

Others see Israel's role as a kingdom of priests primarily in regard to their special relationship with God.⁶⁴ Wells, for example, argues that 'it suggests those who are concerned with approaching God, who are "consecrated" to him and his service, and who specialize in things sacred'.⁶⁵ Davies, too, sees it, primarily, in relation to 'access to the divine presence'.⁶⁶ This is further linked with the idea of the 'priesthood of all believers', though as Wells notes, the emphasis seems to be on the priestly role of the nation, rather than that of every Israelite.⁶⁷

The idea of all Israelites functioning as priests, though, seems incongruous in the light of the imminent ordination of Aaron and his descendants as a separate priestly clan within Israel (e.g. Exod 28:1; 40:12-15; Num 3:3). Even as early as Exodus 19:22,24 there appears to be a distinction between those referred to as 'priests' and the general population. Ahead of the ordination of Aaron, it is unclear who these 'priests' are,⁶⁸ but the existence of a separate group with that designation within the nation makes it unlikely that the whole nation is envisaged as having priestly access to God. Certainly, there were particular roles fulfilled by the ordained priesthood that could not reasonably be assigned to the nation as a whole. But that necessarily included having access to God, which, even though limited, was not available to the general population. Kaiser suggests that this privileged access was, in fact,

63. See, e.g. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 89; Michael W. Goheen, 'Continuing Steps Towards a Missional Hermeneutic', *Fideles: A Journal of Redeemer Pacific College* 3 (2008): 71; *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 38-39; Kaiser, 'Exodus', 473; Stuart, *Exodus*, 423. Wells notes the link with blessing, though sees it primarily in relation to Israel (*God's Holy People*, 193).

64. E.g. Alexander, *Exodus*, 369; Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 98-100; Duane Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 460; Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 374; Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (London: IVP, 2005), 16-17, 28; Wells, *God's Holy People*, 52, 104-124; P. R. Williamson, 'Promises with Strings Attached: Covenant and Law in Exodus 19-24', in B. S. Rosner and P. R. Williamson (ed.), *Exploring Exodus: Literary, Theological and Contemporary Approaches* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 103-105. Hamilton notes both possibilities, though appears to favour the second (*Exodus*, 304).

65. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 52.

66. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 98.

67. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 52.

68. These may have been the young men who offered sacrifices in Exod 24:5, maybe the first-born who were consecrated to God (Exod 24:5) and later replaced by the Levites (Num 3:11-13), or possibly elders; cf. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 180-181.

made available to Israel, but was at first declined, to be revived later in NT times.⁶⁹ That, though, seems highly speculative. An offer of such significance would, surely, have been more prominent, and we would expect some reference to it being withdrawn. At this point in Israel's history (or shortly thereafter) the people's access to God was, primarily, through the provision made within the cult. To describe what was an essentially mediated access in terms of the nation's *priesthood* seems incongruous, especially when another more specific priesthood, which does enjoy special access to God in a way denied to the people as a whole, was in view. And, as the blessing of Levi indicates, the close relationship with God enjoyed by priests goes beyond worship and consecration and includes teaching and ministry to others as a significant part of their role (cf. Mal 2:5-7). As noted above, bestowing blessing may also be directly related to the priestly function.⁷⁰ It seems more likely, then, that the expression 'kingdom of priests' in Exodus 19:6 suggests an intermediary role, between God and the world. And that may be further reinforced by the view that Israel's special status, described here, is best seen as marking a new phase *vis-à-vis* other nations.

3.2 Significance

The **כִּי** clause lies between these designations of Israel and we now turn to look more specifically at its significance. Clearly, several of the usages assigned to **כִּי** are not relevant here. The main suggestions are that this clause is asseverative, causal, concessive, or explanatory.⁷¹

3.2.1 Asseverative

As noted, the asseverative or emphatic function of **כִּי** has been regarded as its base meaning, and that, in some form, carries over into its OT usage. The NRSV adopts an asseverative translation here: 'Indeed (**כִּי**), the whole earth is mine' (see also NJPS). Dozeman supports the asseverative view.⁷² He argues that the wider passage includes two emphases: separation from the nations as God's

69. Kaiser, 'Exodus', 472–473. His preference is to identify the 'priests' in vv. 22,24 with the people as a whole, ('Exodus', 476) but that seems unlikely.

70. Williamson reasonably asks why some functions of priesthood (e.g. ministry to the nations) should be included in Israel's role while others (e.g. offering sacrifices on their behalf) are excluded ('Promises with Strings Attached', 103–105). However, functions such as teaching (Mal 2:5-7) and bestowing blessing (Gen 14:18-20) may be directly linked with the priestly office, without specific reference to offering sacrifice.

71. E.g. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 55–60; Williamson, 'Promises with Strings Attached', 101–102.

72. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 445–446.

personal possession, which he assigns to a non-P source, and also a universal perspective, including references to Israel as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, which he associates with P. And the contrast is highlighted by the asseverative **כִּי**, ‘indeed’. Dozeman then goes on to point to Israel’s priestly role in relation to the nations. Myers, commenting on the NRSV text, also notes Israel’s special place among the nations. ‘The whole earth is mine’ following the reference to Israel as a ‘treasured possession’ indicates that ‘Israel has a role in the larger scheme of things, a role that ultimately will include all other peoples.’⁷³ And this is then explained further in the designation ‘priestly kingdom and holy nation’. Childs also appears to suggest an asseverative interpretation – ‘surely all the world is mine’ – though he underplays its significance, describing it as a ‘parenthetical remark’ that disturbs the ‘poetic balance of the sentence’.⁷⁴ An asseverative understanding of the clause is certainly possible, and sets the call to priesthood, and the revelation of divine holiness through Israel in the context of God’s rule over the whole earth. It also allows a more natural translation of the conjunction **ו** at the start of verse 6: ‘Indeed the whole earth is mine. And/but you ...’. However, as a statement made by God it seems more subdued than the ‘climactic divine self-asseveration’ that Mulienberg attaches to this kind of **כִּי** clause.

3.2.2 Causal

This is the most common use of **כִּי**. However, it is usual for causal **כִּי** clauses to follow the main clause, and so the relative position of the clause is significant. The ESV is among several English versions which, following the punctuation in the MT, take the **כִּי** clause in Exodus 19:5 with what precedes, and interpret it causally: ‘you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for (**כִּי**) all the earth is mine’ (see also, e.g. NASB, ASV, AV, NIVmg). And a substantial number of commentators adopt a similar view.⁷⁵ Bandstra challenges that view:

73. Myers, *Exodus*, 147.

74. Childs, *Exodus*, 367; though his translation of the text reads causally ‘for all the earth is mine’ (341).

75. E.g. Nathan Bills, *A Theology of Justice in Exodus*, Siphut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 26 (University Park: Eisenbrauns, 2020), 85; DeRouchie, ‘Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4-6’, 97–98; Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 44–46; Durham, *Exodus*, 256; Goheen, *Light to the Nations*, 37–39; ‘Continuing Steps’, 69; Grisanti, ‘The Missing Mandate’, 52; Hamilton, *Exodus*, 293; Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 63; Wright, *Mission of God*, 255, 330, 370; Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal? The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2/307 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 277. Alexander, *Exodus*, 358 and Williamson, ‘Promises with Strings Attached’, 100–102 translate **כִּי** as ‘for’ but favour an explanatory interpretation.

‘if the earth is already his then they too are already his possession’.⁷⁶ It must, therefore, be linked with what follows, and so is unlikely to be causal, and he adopts a concessive reading. That argument, though, does not account for Israel’s status as God’s ‘treasured possession’. Other nations belong to God, as Israel does, and the same term, **לִי** (*li*), which literally means ‘to me’, is used in regard both to Israel (‘you will be my (**לִי**) treasured possession’) and to the world (‘the whole earth is mine (**לִי**)’). But there is a difference between the status of other nations and that of Israel as God’s **סִגְלָה**. As a causal clause linked with what precedes, the **כִּי** clause is not tautologous, but rather could be taken to explain *why* Israel has been thus chosen and set apart. Within the speech-act domain, the **כִּי** clause provides the rationale for the illocutionary act, in the main clause, of God taking Israel as his **סִגְלָה**. It explains and expands on the significance of Israel’s calling, and this is further developed in the following verse, in the designations ‘priestly kingdom’ and ‘holy nation’: ‘Israel is called because the whole world (“earth”) is the object of Yhwh’s care.’⁷⁷ It is possible that the **כִּי** clause might relate more specifically to the last part of the previous clause; to paraphrase: ‘You will be my treasured possession *out of all the nations*, and that is possible *because all the earth is mine*’. That, though, seems less likely; such an explanation is not necessary here and is not present in the similar passages in Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2.⁷⁸ As with the asseverative interpretation, taking the clause with what precedes also allows for a straightforward translation of the start of verse 6: ‘you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for/because all the earth is mine; *and* you shall be to me ...’ This causal interpretation may be further reinforced by the use of **יָאָר** to translate **כִּי** in the LXX.⁷⁹

Although it is usual for a causal clause to follow the main clause, there are occasions where it precedes it.⁸⁰ Some scholars who interpret the **כִּי** clause in Exodus 19:5c causally prefer to take it with verse 6. So, for example, Fretheim suggests the reading ‘Because all the earth is mine, so you, you shall be to me

76. Bandstra, *Syntax*, 296.

77. Dumbrell, *Search for Order*, 46

78. Both ideas are also present in Deut 10:14-15, which highlights Israel’s unique call and required devotion; there is, though, no direct causal connection between them.

79. Wevers takes the clause as causal, relating to the previous clause, though takes it to explain God’s right to choose Israel out of all the nations; see J. W. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, SBLSCS 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 295. That, though, seems unlikely (see comments below).

80. See footnote 27, above.

a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’⁸¹ He links this with the wider creation theme in Exodus, which, in his view, should be read as the second act in the drama that begins in Genesis,⁸² and he sees Exodus 19:3-6 as programmatic for the whole book.⁸³ Verse 5c sums up God’s commitment to the whole earth, which is his, and is, therefore, too important to be consigned to a parenthetical remark (*contra* Childs). He suggests ‘that the phrases relate to a mission that encompasses God’s purposes for the entire world. Israel is commissioned to be God’s people on behalf of the earth which is God’s’.⁸⁴ Though unusual, it is not impossible to position the כִּי clause before the main clause in this way. The previous clause ends with a reference to ‘all nations’ – כָּל-הָעַמִּים (*kol ha’ammim*) – and the כִּי clause begins with similar language, referring to ‘the whole earth’ – כָּל-הָאָרֶץ (*kol ha’arets*) – thus maintaining the continuity of the discourse and satisfying Locatell’s criteria for the כִּי clause to precede the main clause. This repetition both adds emphasis to the idea of God’s possession of all peoples and reinforces Israel’s special role in relation to those nations.

3.2.3 Concessive

As we have seen, the relative position of the כִּי clause in relation to the main clause is important in determining its significance: a concessive כִּי clause usually precedes the main clause.⁸⁵ As discussed above, Bandstra argues that the כִּי clause in Exodus 19:5c does not belong to what precedes and relates it concessively to what follows, though I do not find his argument convincing. The NIV also takes the clause concessively – ‘Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me ...’. And this interpretation is followed by several commentators.⁸⁶ As we have seen, the structure of Exodus 19:5-6 does allow for the כִּי clause to be taken with what follows, though that does not necessarily imply a concessive interpretation. Stuart, who does read the clause concessively, suggests that the verses represent ‘the separation of his chosen people from the general world

81. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212; see also James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 173.

82. Fretheim, ‘Reclamation of Creation’, 354–365.

83. Fretheim, ‘Because the Whole Earth’, 231; see also Walter Brueggemann, ‘The Book of Exodus’, *The New Interpreter’s Bible: Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 834.

84. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 212.

85. I have already suggested that Bandstra’s instances where a concessive clause follows or interrupts the main clause are not convincing (see footnote 36, above).

86. E.g. Garrett, *Exodus*, 453; Martin Lee Hawley, ‘Yahweh’s Priestly Kingdom: A Metaphor for Israel’s Priestly Status Function in Exodus 19.6a’ (PhD Diss., University of Aberdeen, 2021), 46–49; Stuart, *Exodus*, 421; Kaiser comments on the text of the NIV, which gives a concessive interpretation, though he does not specifically note this clause (‘Exodus’, 471).

population'.⁸⁷ That is clearly the case when God chooses Israel to be his **קִהְלָה**, 'out of all the nations'. And it would also follow if the designations 'kingdom of priests' and 'holy nation' also relate specifically to Israel's unique relationship with God. However, if, as Stuart, in my view correctly, argues, those designations point to an intermediary role between God and the world, the occurrence of **כִּי**, interpreted concessively, in that clause seems incongruous. Theologically, the emphasis on God's lordship over the whole world is significant, and Israel's role is unique. However, the effect of verse 6 is to shift the focus from Israel's separation from the world to Israel's role in relation to the world. And this must surely follow *from* God's ownership of 'the whole earth' (v. 6c), rather than being at odds with it, as a concessive reading suggests.

3.2.4 Explanatory

This view generally takes the **כִּי** clause with what follows and argues that it explains what it means to be God's **קִהְלָה** in terms of the description of Israel as a priestly kingdom and holy nation (v. 6). Wells, for example, suggests that the statement about Israel's special status in verse 5b raises a question about the relationship between God and other nations, and the **כִּי** clause in verse 5c notes the aspect of verse 5 that is being explained in verse 6a. She offers the paraphrase 'You will be to me a treasured possession among all peoples. In fact, all peoples are my possession, but you, you ...'⁸⁸ though she does not rule out a direct causal connection 'Because all the earth is mine, therefore you yourselves will be to me ...'⁸⁹ Davies also suggests an explanatory interpretation, again spelling out what Israel's calling as God's **קִהְלָה**, distinct from the nations, means: 'That is, the whole earth is mine, (6a) but you will be mine as a royal priesthood and a holy nation.'⁹⁰ He links this with the use of **כִּי** in the explanation of parables, as in Isaiah 5:7. Williamson's suggested translation is similar: 'for all the earth is mine, but you will be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation'.⁹¹ The explanatory interpretation generally accompanies the view that the designations in verse 6, like that in verse 5, point primarily to Israel's special relationship with God as distinct from that of other nations, rather than suggesting any intermediary role. However, as I have argued, an important aspect of the designation 'kingdom of priests', here, appears to include ministry to the nations, and, consistent with that, it

87. Stuart, *Exodus*, 422.

88. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 49.

89. Wells, *God's Holy People*, 49.

90. Davies, *Royal Priesthood*, 33.

91. Williamson, 'Promises with Strings Attached', 100–102; see also Alexander, *Exodus*, 359.

seems reasonable to understand the כִּי clause in this context as providing the rationale for the movement from Israel's unique calling, 'out of all nations', to its ministry among the nations. As such, this is not significantly different from Locatell's category of metalinguistic causal כִּי.⁹²

3.3 Conclusion

Each of the above interpretations of the כִּי clause in Exodus 19:5c is possible and each has its supporters. In my view, though, a causal interpretation seems the most probable. This is the most common use of כִּי in the wider OT and there seems to be no pressing reason not to understand it in this way here. It also appears to fit the context of Exodus 19:5-6 better than the alternatives. This conclusion depends, in part, on the understanding of Israel's designation as a 'kingdom of priests' (v. 6), which, I have argued, is best understood, in this context, to indicate that the nation is called to an intermediary role in relation the rest of the world. That makes the concessive and explanatory interpretations less likely. I would argue, too, that while it may be possible to take the כִּי clause, understood causally, with verse 6, that is a more unusual reading, and it leads to a less natural translation of the conjunction at the beginning of verse 6. Consequently, it seems better to follow the punctuation in the MT and take it with what precedes, in verse 5. As such, it provides the reason for God's declared action in taking Israel as his קֹדֶשׁ. The further designations, 'holy nation' and 'kingdom of priests', then set out more of what Israel's unique role involves.

4. Implications for an OT Mission Theology

By asserting God's lordship over the whole earth, the (causal) כִּי clause points to his continuing commitment to the created order and lays the foundation both for Israel's monotheistic faith and for the understanding that if he is the God of the whole earth, the whole earth needs to come to know and worship him as Israel does.⁹³ Fretheim points to the significance of this for Israel's role in creation:

A creation theology provides the *cosmic purpose* behind God's redemptive activity on Israel's behalf ... God's redemptive activity on behalf of Israel is not an end in itself; it stands in the service of the entire creation. The

92. So, for example, in his discussion of metalinguistic causal כִּי, Locatell argues that this need not be at odds with Davies' explanatory interpretation (Locatell, *Grammatical Polysemy*, 179, n174).

93. See Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 332.

divine calling to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation appears within the context of that phrase, 'the whole earth is [God's]' in 19:5; Israel is called to a commission on behalf of God's earth.⁹⁴

In this regard, Israel is a model, or microcosm, of what God intended, from the start, for the entire world. So, for example, there are similarities between the descriptions of the completion of the tabernacle and the completion of creation,⁹⁵ suggesting that the tabernacle, and later the temple, in some way reflect the divine order of creation.⁹⁶ The construction of the tabernacle is also closely associated with instructions for observing the Sabbath.⁹⁷ On the seventh day God rested, and it is reasonable to assume that all creation was intended to share that rest, and that is anticipated in the institution of the Sabbath in Israel.⁹⁸

Alexander suggests that Fretheim may be reading too much into the clause, and that 'it may simply imply that Israel is to have a role in a world that is God's'.⁹⁹ He does, though, relate that to the rest of creation, as a partial restoration of the Edenic ideal which was lost following the Fall, and which will, ultimately, include the whole world.¹⁰⁰ Goldingay, too, while suggesting

94. Fretheim, *God and World*, 110–111.

95. See, e.g. Fretheim, *God and World*, 128–129; J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 85–86; J. G. McConville, *God and the Earthly Power: An Old Testament Political Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 58–59; Okoye, *Israel and the Nations*, 31–32.

96. Fretheim describes the tabernacle as 'a microcosm of creation ... the world order as God intended, writ small in Israel' (*God and World*, 128); see also G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 17 (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 31–36; see also B. W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical Symbolism in the Bible* (New York: Association Press, 1967), 64–65; R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 65–69.

97. Sabbath regulations immediately follow the first set of instructions for building the tabernacle (Exod 31:12–17) and immediately precede the second (Exod 35:1–3). See also McConville, *God and the Earthly Power*, 58; D. C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12–17; 35:1–3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 135–149, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666530913>.

98. E.g. Childs, *Exodus*, 416; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 122–123; Fretheim, *God and World*, 61–64; Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 56–57.

99. Alexander, *Exodus*, 367.

100. Alexander, *Exodus*, 376. He suggests that in this ideal, humanity has a priestly role in relation to the rest of creation. In my view, it does not seem unreasonable to view Israel's priestly calling in a similar way, but to include the non-Israelite nations in the scope of that ministry.

that ‘kingdom of priests’ does not indicate an intermediary role, notes that ‘the fact that Exodus 19:3-8 is a form of reworking of Genesis 12:1-3 reminds us that this designation links with Yhwh’s lordship over the whole world and works towards the world’s inclusion rather than its exclusion’.¹⁰¹ And a different interpretation of ‘kingdom of priests’ and of the *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל* clause does not necessarily negate that wider biblical theological picture. In my view, though, a causal interpretation suggests that the calling of Israel can be related more directly to the restoration of creation, as an important part of the means by which that restoration will be accomplished. In the context of Exodus 19:5-6, as a ‘holy nation’, Israel is called to show the world what it means to be God’s people;¹⁰² as a ‘kingdom of priests’, Israel will serve as an intermediary, revealing God to the nations and drawing them in to share that relationship. Israel, thus, has a key (pun intended) role in relation to the rest of creation. God’s primary concern is for the whole earth, and it is *because* the whole earth belongs to him that Israel has received its unique calling. And the very similar language used by Peter to describe the church (1 Pet 2:9),¹⁰³ also in the context of proclamation, indicates that this has ongoing implications for all God’s people.

5. Conclusion

My purpose in this article is to look at the meaning of the *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל* clause in Exodus 19:5c and its significance for a wider biblical theology of mission in the OT. *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל* has a wide variety of uses in the OT, and at least four, asseverative, causal, concessive, and explanatory, have been discussed in relation to this clause. Whilst all are possible, the causal interpretation seems to me the most likely, and to best fit the context. This understanding of the clause reinforces the view that God is committed to the whole world, and that his choice of a special people, was not an end in itself, but was, rather, a means of fulfilling that divine commitment.

101. Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 374.

102. Durham suggests that Israel will be ‘a showcase to the world of how being in covenant with Yahweh changes a people’ (*Exodus*, 263). According to Williamson, ‘Israel was to be a nation reflecting God’s value system, modelling God’s standards of justice by living according to God’s code of ethics, a nation demonstrating God’s paradigm for life and society’ (‘Promises with Strings Attached’, 105).

103. See footnote 50, above.

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