MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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DOCUMENT 172

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 — The Covenant Preamble

A Covenant Deep Dive

"I Am Yahweh Your Elohim" — Why the Ten Words Begin With Identity, Not Law"

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REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✡ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Rabbinic tradition (b. Makkot 24a) holds that Israel heard only the first two of the Ten Words — "I am Yahweh" and "You shall have no other gods" — directly from Yahweh's own voice, the rest mediated through Moshe. Shemot 20:2 is treated as the foundation utterance upon which all 613 mitzvot rest.	Christian tradition has frequently detached the Decalogue from its narrative preamble, treating the "Ten Commandments" as free-standing moral law (natural law, "written on the heart," Romans 2:14-15) rather than covenant stipulations addressed to a specific redeemed people.	The Qur'an's own self-identification formula echoes the same structure — Allah identifies Himself by His acts (creation, sustaining, mercy) before issuing command. Identity and historical deliverance precede legal obligation, just as in the Tanakh.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the Tanakh — the written covenant of Yahweh. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and theological comparison only. The Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written Tanakh. Yahweh (יהוה) and Elohim (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Hebrew book names are given with English in parentheses. Hebrew transliterations appear in bold italic with English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Shemot (Exodus), Devarim (Deuteronomy), Bereishit (Genesis), Vayikra (Leviticus)	Foundation text — the covenant preamble and its restatement
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Hoshea (Hosea), Yirmeyahu (Jeremiah), Yechezkel (Ezekiel)	Prophetic recall of the Exodus identity-formula as covenant accusation and restoration
Ketuvim (Writings)	Tehillim (Psalms)	Liturgical recital of Yahweh's self-identification by act of deliverance

I. THE TEXT AND ITS PLACE

I-A. The Verse Itself

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 reads, in the Masoretic Hebrew:

"Anokhi Yahweh Eloheikha asher hotzeitikha me-eretz Mitzrayim mi-beit avadim" — "I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves."

This single verse is the hinge of the entire Sinai covenant. It is not the first of the Ten Words by rabbinic count merely by position — it is structurally and theologically prior to every commandment that follows, because it establishes the identity of the speaker and the basis of His authority before a single instruction is given.

I-B. Anokhi (אָנֹכִי) — The Emphatic "I"

The Hebrew opens with anokhi (אָנֹכִי) rather than the more common ani (אֲנִי) — both meaning "I," but anokhi carrying an archaic, weightier, more emphatic register reserved for formal and covenantal self-declaration. BDB (Brown-Driver-Briggs) notes anokhi as the fuller form of the first-person pronoun, used overwhelmingly in solemn, formal address. **Yahweh** does not begin the covenant with a command. **He begins with Himself — an emphatic, unmistakable self-disclosure that brooks no ambiguity about who is speaking and on what authority.**

I-C. The Verb Hotzeitikha (הוֹצֵאתִיךָ) — "I Brought You Out"

The verb hotzeitikha **(הוֹצֵאתִיךָ)**, from the root yatza **(יָצָא,** H3318 — to go out, come out), in the Hiphil causative stem with first-person subject and second-person singular object, means precisely "I caused you to go out" — "I brought you out." The verb is not "you escaped" or "you were freed" — it is causative and personal: **Yahweh** Himself performed the

action upon Israel. The grammar itself refutes any reading in which the Exodus was a natural or political event that **Yahweh** merely permitted. He is the grammatical subject of the deliverance.

II. BEIT AVADIM (בֵּית עֲבָדִים) — THE HOUSE OF SLAVES

II-A. Avadim, Not Merely Avadut

The phrase mi-beit avadim (מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים) is rendered "house of bondage" or "house of slaves." Avadim (עֲבָדִים) is the plural of eved (עֶבֶד, H5650 — slave, servant, bondman). The word is the same root used throughout Tanakh for both forced chattel slavery and covenant servanthood — Israel itself is later called **Yahweh's** eved (servant) in the Eved Yahweh passages of Yeshayahu (Isaiah). The deliberate echo is structural: Israel moves from being avadim (slaves) to Pharaoh to being eved (servant) of Yahweh — a complete transfer of covenant lordship, not a transition to autonomy. Freedom in the Tanakh is never freedom from all service — it is freedom from the wrong master into covenant with the right One.

II-B. Why the House of Slavery Must Be Named Before the Law Is Given

Yahweh does not say merely "**I am Yahweh your Elohim**" and proceeds to law. He anchors His authority in a specific, datable, geographically located historical act — the deliverance from a named place (eretz Mitzrayim, the land of Egypt) and a named condition (beit avadim, the house of slaves). The commandments that follow in Shemot 20:3-17 are not, therefore, abstract universal ethics imposed by raw divine power. They are the stipulations of a covenant offered by a Redeemer to a people He has already, historically, concretely rescued. Law follows grace; obligation follows deliverance. This ordering is not incidental — it is the entire logic of covenant.

III. THE COVENANT FORMULA — ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY STRUCTURE

III-A. Suzerain-Vassal Treaty Pattern

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 follows the well-attested Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty form found in Hittite and other second-millennium BCE political treaties:

(1) preamble identifying the great king (suzerain);

(2) historical prologue recounting the suzerain's benevolent acts toward the vassal;

(3) stipulations (the obligations laid on the vassal);

(4) blessings and curses for compliance or breach;

(5) witnesses.

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 functions precisely as the preamble plus historical prologue of this form — identity (**"I am Yahweh your Elohim"**) followed immediately by a historical benevolent act ("who brought you out of the land of Egypt"). The Ten Words that follow are the stipulations. This establishes that the Decalogue is a covenant document with a covenant Suzerain, not a freestanding code of universal ethics floating apart from a relationship.

III-B. Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:6 — The Verbatim Restatement

When Moshe (Moses) restates the covenant to the second generation at the edge of the land, he repeats the identical formula verbatim:

"**Anokhi Yahweh Elohekha asher hotzeitikha me-eretz Mitzrayim mi-beit avadim**" "**I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves." (Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:6)**

The exactness of the restatement — forty years later, to a new generation that did not personally witness the Exodus — establishes that the covenant identity-claim is transmitted, recited, and renewed across generations. The formula is the perpetual ground on which every subsequent generation's obligation to the commandments rests, regardless of whether that generation personally experienced the deliverance.

IV. THE FORMULA ECHOED AND ENFORCED THROUGHOUT TANAKH

Per the **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. The following witnesses corroborate that Shemot 20:2's self-identification formula is the controlling grammar of the entire covenant relationship, invoked by Yahweh Himself at moments of both demand and restoration.

Witness One — Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:36: The Formula as Grounds for Ethical Command

"You shall have just balances, just weights... I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:36). Yahweh grounds even commercial honesty in the Exodus deliverance formula. The identity-claim is not reserved for the Decalogue alone — it is the recurring ground clause for the entire Holiness Code.

Witness Two — Hoshea (Hosea) 13:4: The Formula as Covenant Accusation

"I am Yahweh your Elohim from the land of Egypt; you know no Elohim but Me, and besides Me there is no savior" (Hoshea [Hosea] 13:4). The prophet recalls the identical formula centuries later — not to comfort, but to accuse a generation that has forgotten who delivered them. The formula functions as covenant lawsuit grounds.

Witness Three — Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 20:5-7: The Formula at the Moment of Election

"I said to them, I am Yahweh your Elohim... I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt" (Yechezkel [Ezekiel] 20:5,7, paraphrased per JPS sense). Yechezkel traces the self-disclosure formula back to the moment of Israel's election in Egypt, before the Exodus itself.

Witness Four — Tehillim (Psalms) 81:10: The Formula as Liturgical Memory

"I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it" (Tehillim [Psalms] 81:10).

What this is saying:

Yahweh introduces Himself by what He already did — He got you out of Egypt. That's His credential. Then He says: open your mouth wide and I will fill it. In other words, come to Me with a big ask. Don't be timid. I'm the One who pulled you out of slavery — do you really think I can't feed you, provide for you, take care of you now?

Why the covenant community kept reciting it:

The people didn't just say this once. They said it over and over in their worship. And notice what they attached it to — not a warning, not a punishment, but a promise of supply. The same God who rescued them in the past is the same God who will provide for them today. He doesn't change. The rescue and the daily provision come from the same source.

The bottom line:

If Yahweh was powerful enough to break the chains of an entire nation held by the most powerful empire on earth, He is more than capable of meeting whatever need you bring to Him today. The formula — "I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of Egypt" — isn't just a history lesson. It's a reminder: **the God who acted then is still acting now.** Open your mouth wide. He's already proven He can deliver.

V. WHY IDENTITY PRECEDES INSTRUCTION — THE COVENANT LOGIC

V-A. Law Without Identity Is Tyranny; Identity Without Law Is Sentiment

A command issued by an unidentified or unproven power is merely an exercise of force. A relationship declared without resulting obligation is merely sentiment. **Shemot (Exodus) 20:2** refuses both errors. **Yahweh** has already, verifiably, historically acted on Israel's behalf, and the nation that received that deliverance is a first-hand witness to it (and per the Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15 standard, a witnessed, communal, datable event — not a private revelation requiring blind faith). Only after establishing that historical, relational ground does He issue stipulation.

V-B. The Rejection of Both Legalism and Antinomianism

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 stands as the Tanakh's own corrective to two opposite errors recurring across all three covenant-adjacent traditions: legalism — treating the commandments as a self-justifying system of merit detached from the deliverance that grounds them — and antinomianism — treating relationship with **Yahweh** as eliminating the obligation that flows from being delivered. The covenant preamble holds both together: you are delivered, and therefore you are obligated.

The Two Ditches — and Why Shemot 20:2 Keeps You Out of Both

Here it is in plain terms: Throughout history, people who encounter the covenant of **Yahweh** tend to fall into one of two opposite ditches.

Ditch #1 — Legalism

This is when you take the commandments and treat them like a points system. You follow the rules to earn your way, to build up credit, to prove you deserve something from **Yahweh.** The problem is you've completely forgotten *why* the commandments exist in the first place. **Yahweh** didn't hand down the law to a random group of people so they could work their way up to Him. He had already pulled them out of slavery first. The rescue came before the rules. When you forget that, the commandments become a treadmill — and no matter how fast you run, you never feel like you've done enough.

Ditch #2 — Antinomianism

This is the opposite mistake. This is when someone says: "I have a relationship with **Yahweh** — I've been saved, I've been delivered, I've been forgiven — so the rules don't apply to me anymore. Grace covers everything." The problem here is

you've forgotten that being rescued by someone creates a real obligation. If someone pulls you out of a burning building, you don't walk away and do whatever you want as if it never happened. The relationship itself carries weight.

What Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 Does

Before **Yahweh** gives a single commandment, He says: ***I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.*** That one sentence holds both ditches in check at the same time.

To the legalist it says: **you didn't earn this.** The deliverance already happened before you did anything. You can't work your way to it — it's already done.

To the antinomian it says: **that deliverance created a real relationship, and real relationships come with real obligations.** You were bought out of one master and brought under another. That means something.

The Bottom Line

You are delivered — that's grace, that's rescue, that's gift. *And therefore* you are obligated — that's the natural response of someone who actually understands what was done for them. Neither half cancels the other. You need both sentences to get it right.

VI. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION HANDLES THE PREAMBLE

	STRENGTH / DEPARTURE RISK	NOTES
JUDAISM	Preserves inseparability of identity and law most consistently (b. Makkot 24a).	Risk: 613 mitzvot treated as self-sufficient system detached from the deliverance — ritual without relationship (cf. Yeshayahu 1).
CHRISTIANITY	Pauline logic (Romans 6) retains deliverance-precedes-obligation structure.	Risk: extracting the Decalogue as free-standing universal ethics, detached from the specific historical Redeemer and redeemed people.
ISLAM	Qur'anic self-identification formulas parallel the Tanakh's preamble-before-stipulation pattern.	Risk: shari'ah administered as a legal system detached from active recollection of Allah's gracious acts — same legalism risk as Judaism's.

VII. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON SHEMOT (EXODUS) 20:2

1. **Yahweh** establishes His authority to command by an emphatic, unmistakable self-disclosure (anokhi) before issuing a single stipulation. — Shemot (Exodus) 20:2

2. The verb hotzeitikha is causative and personal: **Yahweh** Himself, not chance or political circumstance, performed Israel's deliverance. — Shemot (Exodus) 20:2

3. Israel's transition is from avadim (slaves) to Pharaoh to **eved** (servant) of **Yahweh** — a transfer of lordship, not an arrival at autonomy. — Shemot (Exodus) 20:2; Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 41-53

4. The preamble follows the recognized Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty form: identity and historical benevolent act precede stipulation. — Shemot (Exodus) 20:2-17

5. The formula is restated verbatim to the second generation, establishing transgenerational covenant obligation on the same historical ground. — Devarim (Deuteronomy) 5:6

6. The formula recurs as the ground clause for ethical command, covenant accusation, election, and liturgical blessing — the controlling grammar of the covenant. — Vayikra 19:36; Hoshea 13:4; Yechezkel 20:5-7; Tehillim 81:10

7. Identity precedes instruction by covenant design: law without prior relationship is tyranny; relationship without resulting law is sentiment. — Shemot (Exodus) 20:2-17

VIII. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PERSON UNDER THE COVENANT TODAY

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 is not a historical curiosity preserved only for ancient Israel. It establishes the permanent pattern by which Yahweh relates to His covenant people: He acts first, identifies Himself by that act, and only then issues command. The contemporary covenant community — whether approaching this text from Judaism, Christianity, or Islam — must resist the temptation to treat the commandments of Yahweh as a freestanding ethical code disconnected from the Redeemer who gave them and the deliverance that grounds them. Obedience is the reasonable response of the delivered, not the precondition of being delivered. The house of slaves was left behind by Yahweh's own act, not by Israel's own merit; the commandments that follow are the terms of grateful, covenant fidelity owed to the One who already, historically, acted.

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Devarim (Deuteronomy) 19:15	Two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governing this document	Doctrinal Authority; IV; V-A
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"I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves."

Shemot (Exodus) 20:2 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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