

Expansions upon the Book of Exodus

Introduction

This document comes upon the heels of its predecessor, *Expansions upon the Book of Genesis*, and follows the same basic approach. That is to say, it is a document viewed from the point of view of *lectio divina*, the slow, meditative reading of Scripture which allows dwelling upon the text for as long as one wishes. In other words, *lectio* is not a reading of Scripture as we understand it today but more a praying of it. Surely an attractive practice, yet many people, even those with many years of experience, find it more difficult to implement than at first glance. This is largely due to the emphasis society places upon covering as much material as possible. It also involves two tendencies: to view the Bible from the scientific standpoint and the lesser know one of a sometimes fanciful or far-fetched allegorical approach sometimes adopted by early Christian writers. As for the latter, virtually all were ignorant of the incredible richness of the Hebrew language. You don't become aware of the powerful grip of these two very different tendencies until you actually take up the biblical text and try your hand at *lectio*. Because *lectio divina* is a unique form of reading coupled with prayer leading to contemplation—and that may be described broadly as the suspension of thought, albeit temporary—the discipline to carry it out is unfamiliar and requires considerable practice. This practice must be done on a regular basis because it can be lost quickly. To borrow an image from the first chapter in Exodus, *lectio* is not unlike those midwives who assisted at the birth of their fellow Israelite women. Without them we would be fruitless. Despite the formidable obstacles which can be depicted in Pharaoh's decree to slay all newly born Israelite males, *lectio divina* is open to every person desirous of cultivating a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In the text at hand, the reader will quickly discover that transliterated Hebrew words (in italics) abound. That means the manner in which *lectio divina* is presented presupposes an appreciation of that original biblical language, the only way such nuances may be uncovered. This orientation can make the document cumbersome and even intimidating for some folks. However, staying with the notes will show that such is not the case, that the Hebrew text can speak volumes to those without any knowledge of the language.

As with the *Genesis* document, the Hebrew word *selah* is inserted in part of the notations. To refresh the reader, *selah* originally was intended as a liturgical pause. Here it used as a pause enabling the reader to reflect on what had been read but more importantly transforms itself into an occasion, however brief, for resting in God's presence. To preclude repetition and to save space, the reader can get more about all this from the Introduction to *Genesis*. As for *selah* and what it signifies, it is included after each paragraph for the first six chapters of Exodus. All comments presented here have the important value of *selah* in mind without which the this document would be of no use. *Selah* allows us to expand the biblical text from within, if you will, hence the reason for incorporating that term into the title. Such expansions are based upon the text itself without straying from its intent while at the same time allowing for a fuller interpretation. For historical information and so forth, plenty of fine material exists about Exodus. However, the text at hand differs substantially because at issue here is the actual practice of *lectio divina*.

Exodus is chock full of miraculous events starting with the Lord's appearance to Moses in the burning bush through the ten plagues, on to the crossing of the Red Sea and the wonders he had performed in the Sinai wilderness including impartation of the Torah. They come at us so frequently and in such spectacular form that the only possible explanation we're stuck with is that they reflect the tendency of ancient peoples to interpret inexplicable natural events through divine intervention. The approach adopted by *lectio divina* does not ally itself with the literal interpretation nor the one which explains it away but adopts a third approach. That is to say, *lectio* regards the text not so much as a historical document nor as a catalogue of miracles attributed to the divinity but as means of assisting the reader to access God's presence here and now. Adopting this approach allows for expanding certain elements of the Exodus text while not straying from the story at hand nor of reading into it what does not belong there. Hence the word "expansion" as part of this document's title. Thus we are dealing with an approach to Scripture very different from the ones we've become familiar with yet right at the heart and intention of the text itself. In fact, this type of reading Exodus in the spirit of *lectio* is not unlike how some strands of Judaism which approached Exodus with a special eye

upon the Hebrew text. Hence the effort placed in looking at the definitions of words in the Hebrew but—and it can't be repeated enough—with a view towards using these words as a vehicle for contemplative prayer. Once familiar with them (for many are repeated but with varying meanings), the true grandeur and meaning of a text as Exodus becomes self-evident as a means of conveying us to God's presence. For Christians, all this offers new insight into the mystery of Jesus Christ and makes him all that more attractive.

All biblical citations are taken from **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha** (i.e., the **Revised Standard Version**).

Chapter One

The first word of Exodus is not included in the English translation and therefore is revealing as to its relationship with the Book of Genesis. That is to say, the text has the conjunctive *w-* ('and') prefaced to the first word which is "these." Thus vs. 1 starts off as "And these are the names of the sons of Israel." Only the first word of Genesis itself lacks *w-* by reason of its preeminence or beginning with the account of creation. To insert *w-* would imply that something had existed before God as well as his creative activity. The reason for this *w-* which gets the Book of Exodus rolling? To continue in seamless fashion where Genesis left off. The *w-* at hand is a "big" *w-*; that is to say, not only does it connect two distinct books but does so as if no time nor spacial gap ever existed between them. Temporally speaking, we're talking about a gap of some four hundred and thirty years which exists between the last verse of Genesis and the first verse of Exodus, quite a span to cover for such a small conjunctive as "and." To bring this important insight home, consider how the two verses run together: "So (*w-*) Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. And (*w-*) these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob (etc.)." The reader is invited to pass over this lengthy interval which in itself is not without significance, not unlike the unrecorded years of Jesus prior to his ministry which comprises the bulk of his temporal existence. Frequent reference to this span of four hundred-plus years will be made in this document.

Selah

"And" brings us to the "names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household" [vs. 1]. The reason for this "first Exodus" was because of famine and more specifically, Joseph who had become second in charge of the country, right after Pharaoh. With the exception of the unnamed Pharaoh who dealt harshly with them, the land, people and presumably most succeeding Pharaohs had been exceptionally magnanimous. Surely Israel thought that any new Pharaoh would have in mind what Joseph had done for Egypt, saving it from ruin.

Selah

The movement of Israel and his sons into Egypt started off as a desire to seek a place of refuge. Those who set out on this relatively short journey never had in mind putting down roots, just staying a generation or two..no more...after which the people would return home. Besides, people who accompanied Israel and his family wished for a swift return; they wanted to have at least a few of Israel's sons still alive to function as leaders in their reestablishment. Then there was the problem of the Canaanites. They were delighted to get rid of the upstart immigrants within their midst and would put up stiff resistance should they attempt a return. Chances are many Canaanites cheered the Israelites as they made their southwest trek.

Selah

Dinah, the sister of Israel's twelve sons, whom Simeon and Levi rescued from the hands of Shechem, was an instrumental figure at this stage of history. She isn't recorded as having accompanied the family to Egypt though visits between Canaan and Egypt must have been frequent. Travel was easier after the seven years of famine had ended, so people could shuttle back and forth within several days. Chances are that Dinah had married one of Israel's descendants, giving rise to a line that would remain in Canaan and maintain the old ways and traditions. In this she was faithful to her ancestor Abraham's commandment not to marry a local Canaanite. That would defile the heritage permanently. Thus Dinah's task was to remain in Canaan as a kind of reference point...a reminder to Israel's sons and descendants that Egypt was not the land God had intended for them. And so she and her lineage became responsible for keeping alive the dream of return.

Selah

As for Israel's sons, some time went by without any hint of a return home. Joseph dies and they remain. Generation after generation arises and still nothing. Goshen turned out to be the best of all possible worlds, a

refuge from which no one wanted to leave. Because things were so good could this indeed be the promised land? Besides, Joseph himself had brought Israel to Goshen, a good a sign as any. Single-handedly he put the most powerful country in the world at his disposal. And so, had Abraham been mistaken, even deluded? It seemed so, but nagging voices from Dinah and her clan kept saying no, that their stay in Egypt was temporary and that it was time to come home. Certainly the Israelites could have picked up and leave any time. However, all the Pharaohs starting from Joseph's time to just prior to the birth of Moses must have been ideal rulers. If one or several of them had made life intolerable, we would have heard of it long before now.

Selah

Vss. 2-3 list the offspring belonging to sons of Israel as "seventy persons" followed by a simple statement—a recap of sorts from the end of Genesis—which mentions Joseph's death as well as those of his generation. Now vs. 7 itself acts as the conjunctive *w-* mentioned above as introducing the Book of Exodus, here as the word "but:" "But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly." *Parah* is the verb for "were fruitful" as in 23.30: "Little by little I will drive them out from before you until you are increased and possess the land." It is used in conjunction with the verb, *sharats* (increased) which means to creep, crawl: "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm." This idea of swarming suggests propagation gone out of control and conveys a less than desirable feeling for the native Egyptians. Vs. 7 continues with this theme of explosive population growth: "they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them." The first two verbs at hand are *ravav* and *hatsam* with the latter having for "exceedingly" *bim'od me'od* or literally "in excessive excessive." In other words, no one could keep track of these people as they multiplied beyond all expectation. *Hatsam* means to bind fast, be strong in number as in vs. 20 as well as Ps 105.24: "And the Lord made his people very fruitful and made them stronger than their foes."

Selah

As for the last verb (the simple *mala'*), it means to full and sums up the incredible capacity for propagation of the first four verbs. These verbs apply to *'erets* or land which, of course, is Egypt beginning in the original place of settlement, Goshen. Thus the Israelites quickly spread from Goshen to all parts of Egypt. Obviously this happened gradually over the span of some four hundred plus years until Moses comes on the scene. The Pharaoh whom Joseph had served didn't foresee what became a national threat, that the Israelites would outnumber the Egyptians. By the end of their stay, many if not all Israelites had lost contact with Dinah and her clan who attempted to keep alive memory of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham. By now many Israelites were wondering if Egypt wasn't their final destiny, but never do we encounter sentiments of this sort. Moses made it a point to delete them from his account, but they must have been fairly wide spread.

Selah

Vs. 8 is short yet ominous: "Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph." Implied here is that this particular Pharaoh, unlike his predecessors, stands out from them by reason of not having known Joseph, *yadah* being the verb which connotes intimate familiarity. "You know when I sit down and when I rise up" [Ps 139.2]. Obviously this Pharaoh, as well as those before, did not know Joseph, for they came into power well after his death. However, the *yadah* at hand is a knowing that can extend beyond the limits of space and time. Not to know Joseph is not to know the *chesed* or tender mercy for which he was renowned. So in the case at hand, *yadah* = *chesed* and lack of *yadah* = lack of *chesed*. One gets the impression that the Pharaohs had a fairly good track record here, no mean feat for any country. But that is beside the point. The Israelites, not the Egyptians, are the prime object of Exodus' saga. As for the current Pharaoh, it makes no matter who he was, even if we knew his name, for to lack *chesed* was not worth having his name remembered for future generations. Since the issue of *chesed* is at hand, we can only speculate whether or not Israel's descendants picked up any of it. They are just as deficient as the Egyptians among whom they lived—and that includes the sitting Pharaoh—though a small remnant must have kept it alive until the appearance of Moses. This is not unlike the small yet vital divine spark stemming from Adam through Noah and on to Abraham, lack of which (i.e., *chesed*) contributed to Israel's predicament. In sum, it was partly their fault, not entirely Pharaoh's.

Selah

Note that in vss. 9-10 Pharaoh addresses not just those in his court but "his people:" "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us." Pharaoh addressed his people in the person of messengers who flooded the land and made known his sentiments to virtually every living person. For a messenger to speak in Pharaoh's name was the same as if he were present. He begins the decree with *hineh* (behold) which means something like "Look about you; pay close attention to what I am about to say." *Hatstam* is the verb for

“mighty” and means to bind or tie up and is found in vs. 20: “and the people multiplied and grew very strong.” In other words, the Israelites were so prolific (at least that was the official slant) that they threatened to “bind up” the Egyptians, their hosts for the past four hundred years, which was intolerable. However, this decree had to come from some courtiers within Pharaoh’s court who felt their authority threatened. Pharaoh himself may not have subscribed to this but had to adopt their position or else his supporters might overthrow him. Surely he must have considered his predecessors, of how they kept alive the *chesed* of Joseph and if he had his own way, would follow in their tracks. We see traces of this later on when in dialogue with Moses: “Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me” [10.17].

Selah

“Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply” [vs. 10]. “Come” is similar to *hineh* but is borders on making a demand, of having all Egyptians join the common cause of making life difficult for the Egyptians. Actually this Pharaoh had good advisors, for they counseled him to get at the root of the problem, “lest they multiply,” *ravah* being the verb which was used in vs. 7 (‘they multiplied’). At this juncture being overwhelmed by Israelites was not quite a threat but one that was looming on the horizon. That’s what is implied by the word “lest” (*pen*). As for acting shrewdly, the verb is *chakam*, fundamentally as to be wise. “Be not righteous overmuch and do not make yourself over-wise” [Eccl 7.16]. What Pharaoh means by *chakam* is soon spelled out and boils down to enslaving the Israelites for construction purposes.

Selah

Next in vs. 10 Pharaoh plays his trump card: “if war befall us.” Always the threat of invasion loomed, for the rich Nile River valley offered some of the best farmland in the region. Control that and you control Egypt. Pharaoh mentions enemies but leaves them unspecified. No matter, just the thought of raising the possibility of external foes uniting with non-Egyptians dwelling within Egypt was frightening enough. Despite this, Pharaoh was more intent on the Israelites escaping Egypt (‘and escape from the land’) which means the loss of his labor force. As for the verb “escape,” it’s *halah* or go up...go up to Canaan, the land from which the Israelites had come. So he offers a paradox of sorts. On one hand Pharaoh appeals to national sentiment while on the other hand, makes his subjects aware of the value Israelite slavery would mean to their economy.

Selah

Having outlined the general threat posed by the Israelites and by not expanding upon it more, Pharaoh leaves the rest up to the imagination of his subjects. Give that they posed a threat (real or perceived), and the Egyptians will be galvanized into action. As for the action eventually taken, the Egyptians decided against expulsion or even extermination, for they recognized the Israelites as a potential slave pool. That’s why “they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens” [vs.11]. “They” is a general term which doesn’t include all Egyptians, presumably just some in authority and those with an axe to grind against them. The phrase for “taskmasters” is *sarey misym*. Apparently the first word is “princess” and the second “tribute” or *mas*. “So he bowed his shoulder to bear and became a slave at forced labor” [Gen 49.15]. *Mas* thus connotes not so much that which is burdensome but the notion of paying tribute, not unlike paying a tax.

Selah

Hanah is the verb for “afflict,” and among Hebrew verbs, has one of the most varied meanings (to sing, answer, signify, to oppress). “That we may bind him to afflict him” [Judg 16.5]. *Hanah* is specified, namely, by imposing “heavy burdens” (*sevel*) upon the Israelites which derives from a verbal root meaning to bear or carry. “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket” [Ps 81.7] (This verse seems to reflect the experience now under discussion). As for the labor at hand, it was for building two store-cities, Pithom and Raamses. *Miskenoth* (feminine plural) is the word with six other biblical references, four of which are in Second Chronicles. “He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the store-cities which he built in Hamath.” Reference is to King Solomon who did all this without forced labor, having been mindful of his ancestors’ experience.

Selah

“But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad.” This is the first of two complete sentences in vs. 12. A force was at work among the Israelites which neither they nor the Egyptians could explain. The former must have realized something larger was going on which would manifest itself eventually, and that indeed occurred. The verb for “oppressed” is *hanah* which was noted in the last paragraph along with two counterpoints: 1) “multiplied” or *ravah*, the fourth time used in this chapter and 2) “spread abroad” (*parats*). This verb means to break or destroy in the sense of dispersing what had just been

crushed. It occurs later in 19:22: “lest the Lord break out upon them.” This inability to control the Israelites had the Egyptians “in dread” of them, the verb being *quts* (it has eight other biblical references) which means to be weary, loath. “Neither be weary of his correction” [Prov 3:11].

Selah

The dread just mentioned became compounded: “So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor” [vs. 13]. This time the common verb *havad* (‘serve’) is used which from here on becomes synonymous with abject slavery. Not only were the Israelites made to *havad* with respect to establishing store-cities, this *havad* was done “with rigor” or *perek*, a noun with five other biblical references derived from the verbal root meaning to break, crush. “With force and harshness you have ruled them” [Ezk 34:4]. A noun derived from the verbal root *havad* is found in vs. 14 as *havodah*, very much used in Exodus: “and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field.” However, *havodah* does have positive connotations as in 36:1: “for the service of the sanctuary.” The word “bitter” (*marar*, a verb) connotes something unpleasant to the taste which here applies to the collective lives of the Israelites. That is to say, their work became so hard and onerous that they tasted it as bitter and could not escape it even if they wished. As for the verb *marar*, cf. 1Sam 30:6: “The soul of all the people was grieved.” The verses above applied chiefly to forced labor in construction, but vs. 14 includes work in the field. Again, vs. 14 echoes vs. 13: “in all their work they made them serve with rigor” (*perek*.)

Selah

Because the Nile River was the only fertile place in the country, a very narrow band where people could live, it was easy to keep track of everyone, Egyptians and Israelites alike, quite unlike a population scattered throughout a wide area. We can assume that by the time we reach the next verse dealing with the Israelite midwives Pharaoh had mobilized all the Israelites and their Egyptian taskmasters. The Israelites were laboring in the shadow of the pyramids, even considered ancient by that time. They may have consoled themselves by the thought that people like them had been enslaved more harshly for a longer period of time. Regardless of the inaccuracy of this perception, the looming presence of such monoliths must have had a profound impact upon the collective imagination of the Israelites.

Selah

With the Israelites put to work, now Pharaoh could turn attention to a less obvious but more important issue which gets to the problem at hand, control of the enemy’s population. “Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah” [vs. 15; this verse is incomplete and flows over into the next one]. First Pharaoh had to send out an order to assemble all midwives which meant that any baby born in their absence had a less than favorable chance of survival. But given the resourcefulness of the Israelites, women like Shiphrah and Puah trained people to take their place. As for these two, they are singled out by reason of their expertise and reputation among the people they served; perhaps they ran something like a hospital or clinic for Israelite women to give birth. We don’t hear about Shiphrah and Puah though they must have continued their important profession while the Israelites were wandering in the Sinai desert where their skills were even of greater value. During this wandering it must have been very trying for both women to see how many of these people turned out as disobedient to God. “Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people that were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised” [Josh 5:5]. And so Siphrah and Puah enjoyed fairly intimate terms with virtually every person born in the years before their departure from Egypt.

Selah

“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them upon the birth stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live” [vs. 16]. Words spoken to both the midwives assembled before Pharaoh as well as Shiphrah and Puah, singled out for particular rebuke. “Birth stool” is *’oven* (the only reference in the Bible) which literally means stone and is applied to a low seat or stool on which a woman sits about to give birth, the midwife being nearby. Allowing female babies to live and killing male ones prefigures Herod who “killed all the male children in Bethlehem” [Mt 2:17]. Herod did this because he was tricked by the three wise men, Shiphrah and Puah being a kind of symbol of them. That’s what these two woman did...allow the male children born in and under their care to live without Pharaoh knowing it.

Selah

“But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them but let the male children live” [vs. 17]. *Yare’* is the common verb for “feared” and applies more to a spirit of reverence. It is found in vs.

21 in a similar circumstance. As for the verb “commanded,” it is the common verb *davar* which means to speak. Perhaps at this juncture Pharaoh thought that his mere words and the content of his message were sufficiently intimidating, so he just spoke (*davar*) to the midwives. Besides, they were women and women were considered of less stature and more compliant to any decrees coming from above. The source of this *yare’* for God indicates that the monotheistic religion brought into Egypt with Joseph and his family. However, roots for this worship can extend further back, to the time when Abram dwelt in Egypt to escape a famine (cf. Gen 12.10-20). Now for these midwives to have feared God is no mean feat even if the country (Egypt) up until this Pharaoh had been favorably disposed. For that to endure so long is testimony, especially to the person of Joseph. Besides, the midwives acted as a kind of priestly class for the Israelites because they brought them into existence.

Selah

Vs. 18 shoots back quickly with a response from Pharaoh who got wind of the midwives’ plans. “Why have you done this?” From the start of his plan to slay all male Israelite children Pharaoh had positioned spies to keep an eye out, so it was easy to keep him informed. The midwives retorted with an insult, indicative of that *yare’* for God they embodied: “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women” [vs. 10]. As for the former, they are “vigorous” and “are delivered before the midwife comes to them.” The word for “vigorous” is *chayeh*, the only use of this term in the Bible which is derived from the verbal root “to live.” In other words, the Israelite women are full of life which bespeaks their overall condition, not just their physical one. So if these women don’t require midwives, why are they mentioned in the first place? Certainly they assisted at birth but over the passage of time acquired a mystique which remained with them regardless of whether they assisted at birth or not. It was their *yare’* for God that was their true vocation, giving birth to worship of the true God for over four hundred years in the midst of a wildly, even luxuriantly, polytheistic land.

Selah

“So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong” [vs. 20]. The verb “dealt well” (*yatav*) is the root for the common adjective “good.” “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge good, but the mouths of fools pour out folly” [Prov 15.2]. So the basis of Israelite prosperity in Egypt is divine recognition of the midwives who set the stage for the emergence of Moses. Because of this *yatav*, the “people multiplied and grew very strong.” This is a repetition of vs. 7, “they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong” with the exception of a second *me’od* (‘very’). Such strength is revealed by the Israelites having families (*bayith*, vs. 21) which means house. As for these houses, they were divided in accord with the twelve sons of Israel though nothing is said of this. However, it can easily be presumed.

Selah

“Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live’ [vs. 22]. And so Pharaoh extends his persecution to “all his people” meaning the Egyptians. Since people were concentrated along the banks of the Nile River, it was easy (as noted above) for them to carry out this order. Presumably the people obeyed though Chapter One ends without further details. At this juncture the insertion of *selah* becomes more a pause of fear and trepidation at what follows from this royal decree.

Selah

Chapter Two

“Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi.” This opening verse of new chapter shows the lineage of the soon-to-be-born Moses, the tribe of Levi. Levi, along with his brother Simeon, was mentioned last in Gen 49.5 as “weapons of violence” against whom their father Israel cautioned not to associate (‘come not into their council’). Later the tribe of Levi was “set apart...to carry the ark” [Dt 10.8] or to perform priestly duties. However, to date being associated with Levi was less than flattering, that is, unless members of that tribe had developed some form of ritual worship to keep alive in Egypt, the tradition of the One true God begun by Abraham. Instead of the tribe of Levi, it would appear preferable that Moses, if given a choice, would have been born from the tribe of Joseph who long ago had delivered Egypt and gave refuge to Israel and his sons. Regardless, Levi won out by reason of its connection with formal or liturgical worship which had some form at the time of Moses’ birth. No names are given to Moses’ parents; it is sufficient to know their origins.

Selah

“And when the woman saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months” [vs. 2]. *Tov* is the adjective for “goodly” which means that even as an infant, his parents could intimate qualities that would develop later on. Interestingly, that divine quality of loving kindness or *chesed* associated with Joseph, isn’t mentioned in Exodus as pertaining to him. Moses’ mother managed to get away with a scant three months concealing her new-born son; what forces her to give him up to the waters of the Nile isn’t state explicitly. Surely an Israelite informer or Egyptian discovered that she had given birth to a male child. Perhaps this same woman gave birth to other male infants who weren’t so lucky. It was another matter, however, if the infant was female as was the case, for Moses had a sister (Miriam).

Selah

“And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch” [vs. 3]. The verb *tsaphan* (hide) is used as in the previous verse which connotes a laying up or storing. “He stores up sound wisdom for the upright” [Ps 2.7]. So the mother stores Moses, if you will, for safe keeping within a *tevah* or basket, the same word used for Noah’s ark. Like Noah, she waterproofs this *tevah* (only it’s made of *gome’*, marsh rushes, ‘in vessels of papyrus upon the waters,’ Is 18.2) with bitumen or *chemar*. Two other biblical references exist, both from Genesis: one for constructing the tower of Babel (cf. 11.3) and the other in reference to the Valley of Siddim (cf. 14.8). Surely she had in mind the ark which had saved mankind from the destructive, worldwide flood. To put her son in such an “ark” was repeating this salvific gesture, for later Moses would deliver the world by being the recipient of the Torah. His mother also applied pitch or *zepheth*; two biblical references exist, both in Is 34.9: “And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch...her land shall become burning pitch.”

Selah

Unlike the ark which was obviously noticeable to everyone, the *tevah* at hand was small and easy to construct and therefore away from prying eyes. Once done, she “placed it among the reeds at the river’s bank.” She had two ideal choices, early in the morning or towards evening to escape attention. The reeds acted as a concealed spot before the river’s current took it away and out of sight since it was small and barely noticeable on the expansive Nile. As for Moses’ father, he isn’t recorded as helping out; perhaps he was talking with both Israelites and Egyptians to deflect attention from his wife. As head of the household, he had to give her consent to take this drastic action and hope for the best. The two must have prayed to God for safe conduct of their child which was about to pay off favorably. This incident closes with vs. 4 where Moses’ sister—most likely Miriam though her name isn’t give—was by the Nile watching all that her mother was doing. That means she was older than the infant Moses, old enough to realize this drastic measure yet probably too young to know the full implications. Miriam was told to stay at home but went to the river anyway, taking advantage of the reeds to conceal herself. Surely thoughts of rescuing her infant brother must have crossed her mind, but she was too small to do anything about it except watch anxiously.

Selah

Now this second ark...*tevah*...was about to set sail upon the Nile River and be at the mercy of the current. Because it contained the author of Torah (better, the recorder of it), the *tevah* at hand was far more valuable than Noah’s. Apparently it hadn’t been adrift long, let alone out of the reeds, for “the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river” [vs. 5]. The time was most likely evening after the harsh sun had declined and breezes from the Nile could be felt. And so Moses’ mother must have set her son adrift around the same time. She may have figured that people would be bathing at that time, but Pharaoh’s daughter? Being of royal stock, she was accompanied by maidens and must have done this at a more or less regular time. Thus this incident wasn’t random but planned. The daughter of the king (we don’t have her name) had a reputation for kindness and did not share her father’s harsh treatment of the Israelites, so chances were favorable that she would rescue the infant. Thus thought Moses’ mother. As for the maidens, they may have entertained different thoughts and were tempted to squeal on their mistress, but it didn’t turn out so. While they maidens were off on their usual evening walk, Pharaoh’s daughter spotted Moses among the reeds. That means the distance between his mother and the royal party was close enough to overhear every word that was spoken. The same applied to Miriam. All in all, the plan was risky but brilliant.

Selah

When Pharaoh’s daughter got hold of the *tevah*, immediately she opened it. Perhaps she was familiar with the Noah story handed down among the Israelites in Egypt and considered this a sign or reminder of that distance age when the world was consumed by flood waters. “She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children” [vs. 6]. *Chamal* is the verb for “took pity” which has a connotation of sparing. “As a man

spares his own son" [Mal 3.17]. The princess recognized instantly that Moses was a Hebrew due to his circumcision. Because his mother and sister were close by, Miriam boldly approached the princess with the words "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you" [vs. 7]? Moses' mother must have been mortified at her daughter's audacity and did all she could to refrain herself. This temerity paid off, for the princess told Miriam to fetch the child's mother who was right there among the reeds. Upon hearing these words, the mother raced back home as quickly as possible before her daughter could arrive and dry off so what she had just been doing wouldn't be given away. Pretending not to know a thing, the mother came to the river and acknowledged her identity, still afraid that the princess or one of her maidens might hand her over to Pharaoh. "So the woman took the child and nursed him" [vs. 9]. In other words, back to square one. This command, coupled with the completely unexpected salary for nursing the child, must have shocked the mother, let alone the father. The same applied to her neighbors in the village, some of whom became angry and jealous at her son having been spared. Also, some Israelites took this as a positive omen for their future and did their best to keep the child's identity a secret.

Selah

"And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son" [vs. 10]. How long Moses remained in his mother's care isn't specified, though while growing up, his mother and the princess must have kept in contact, albeit concealed. The only condition—and it was a difficult one—was that the mother was paid to nurse her own child and raise it as someone else's. It became especially hard as the child grew up and received secret visits from its "mother," Pharaoh's daughter, when she went to the river for her bath, virtually a daily ritual. Because the princess was so attracted to Moses, she decided that things would work out better all around if he came to live with her. She hit upon this course of action before the child matured, wondering all along who was its natural mother. Thus the real mother brought the child to the adopted mother, all the while pretending to be its nurse. When in the princess' company, "she named him Moses, for she said, 'Because I drew him out of the water'" [vs. 10]. As for the name Moses, it derives from an Egyptian word meaning to beget a child and here is associated with the Hebrew word *mashah*, to draw or draw out. Two other biblical references, pretty much the same, are Ps 18.16 and 2Sam 22.17, the former being quoted here: "He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of many waters." First Pharaoh's daughter had to remove the *tevah* (basket/ark) from among the reeds and then Moses. So without knowing it, she drew Moses, fulfilling his destiny as future author of the Torah. Today no one searches for Moses' *tevah* while many entertain theories about the one of Noah. Even if both existed, they are irrelevant compared with the Torah which issued from the hand of the future recorder now rescued from the Nile River.

Selah

"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens" [vs. 11]. After the switch of mothers, as it were, on the banks of the Nile River, Moses became a full-fledged Egyptian living in the royal palace whose true identity successfully remained concealed from Pharaoh. Then again, Pharaoh could have known the child's identity but kept quiet out of respect for his daughter who may have been his only child or certainly his favorite. As for the verse at hand, it says that Moses "went out to his people" which reveals that despite having been raised as an Egyptian, he did not identify with that nation. That means his mother and sister Miriam had regular access to him (his mother having been his nurse) and on one propitious day informed Moses of his true identity, that he was an Israelite. He seems to have taken it in stride, even welcomed the news, which is why so early on he recognizes "his people." The act of going out to see them means he left his royal surroundings and sought out the Israelites who continued in bondage. No one compelled him otherwise. Moses did run the risk, however, of having the Egyptian court discover his true roots. Also they may have know it tacitly but remained quiet out of respect for Pharaoh and his daughter. Nevertheless, the Egyptians must have kept a close eye upon him. At this juncture Moses made no one-on-one contact with "his people;" he just "looked on their burdens" or *sevalah* which first is mentioned in 1.11. The verb for "looked" is the common *ra'ah*. How to deal with this would work out shortly, but now was the time for observation. Part of this looking, however, turned into action when he hit upon an "Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people." Again, "his people" is mentioned which automatically made Moses spring into action. The reason for this beating isn't given, but it must have been especially cruel to have moved Moses who already had witnessed plenty of abuse. As for his age ('had grown up'), let's say it is 18-20 years of age. That means Pharaoh had been persecuting the Israelites for some twenty years, so by now the people were close to the breaking point.

Selah

“He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand” [vs. 12]. The verb at hand is *panah* (to turn) “here and here” (*koh wkoh*) which is indicative of Moses being on guard in a furtive, nervous fashion attempting to disguise the action he was about to undertake. The mood of just indignation and desire to intervene reveals itself again shortly when Moses comes across two Hebrews struggling together, a trait he would use to great advantage before Pharaoh despite some innate bashfulness. One of the Hebrews asked “Who made you a prince and a judge over us” [14]? *Sar* is the word for “prince” which can apply to a commander of soldiers. “To bind his princes at his pleasure” [Ps 105.22]. Then follows in the same breath, “Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Despite the precaution Moses had taken—*panah* this way and that—someone had seen what happened, most likely peering over a sand dune or from behind a partially completed building. The circumstance was most likely some building project where the Egyptian (taskmaster) started beating the Israelite, so plenty of people were moving about. The verse at hand ends with “Surely the thing is known,” the noun for “thing” being *davar* or literally, word. That is to say, *davar* being a word is endowed the swiftness of speech and quickly reached Pharaoh. He may not have been concerned if it weren’t for the partially completed building project near which this slaying occurred; otherwise, he would have let it pass. But if a Hebrew slew an Egyptian, that is, a slave killed his master, Pharaoh might soon have an all-out rebellion on his hands. At that point Moses’ cover and safety net provided by Pharaoh’s daughter was blown. Despite Pharaoh’s love for his daughter, he couldn’t allow such an incident pass by, one with the potential of undermining his throne. The importance of *davar* is again revealed with the ominous words, “When Pharaoh heard of *davar*, he sought to kill Moses” [vs. 15].

Selah

“But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well” (The RSV continues the same verse, 15 as a new paragraph). This flight means that Moses had to leave the palace in a hurry and therefore his step-mother, Pharaoh’s daughter. He was too ashamed to inform her but hoped the truth would emerge later on. The flight (*baraq*) literally reads “from the face of Pharaoh” which means his presence, and being an absolute ruler, getting away from his face was a difficult thing to do. Hence Moses had to leave the country immediately. The text says in a straight-forward manner that Moses sought refuge in Midian which suggests he knows where he is going and perhaps had planned it ahead long ago just in case. As for the Midianites, they were connected with Israel through Abraham’s second wife Keturah (cf. Gen 25.2). It seemed that link may have endured the test of time. Closer to Moses’ time frame and tradition, the Midianites were traders to whom Israel’s sons had sold Joseph, thereby bringing him into Egypt (cf. Gen 37.28). Later when Joseph got established and made a name for himself, people from Midian came to him for grain. Thus these traders kept alive the memory of Joseph’s *chesed* or loving kindness, a trait that over the years became associated with Midian for which it was justly proud. While its location isn’t exactly certain, Midian seems to be in northwest Arabia or the Sinai Desert region. That means Moses had to cross the Red Sea—how people did that was perhaps by boat—and then make it on foot across the desert. Thus unconsciously he laid out the future route of the exodus his people would take.

Selah

In Genesis, wells, the source of water, are favorite meeting places as in the case of Abraham’s anonymous servant when he went searching for a wife for Isaac (cf. Gen 24) and later with Jacob (cf. Gen 29), that incident not unlike the one about to unfold, plus a number of others. All were gathering natural places jealously guarded; the same applies to the one Moses takes his rest. Furthermore, he was far enough from Pharaoh’s reach and could think about settling down even if removed from his people. What Pharaoh’s daughter, his step-mother thought about all this, is unrecorded though she must have been quite distressed at her son not having turned out as she hoped. Moses had the potential of becoming a Second Joseph...even a Pharaoh...whose memory was alive among the Egyptians.

Selah

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flocks” [vs. 16]. Note that all seven daughters came compared with the story of Rachel. That made a deep impression upon Moses, for it was easy to intimate that their father was quite wealthy. The name of the priest (*kohen*) isn’t given until the beginning of Chapter Three (i.e., Jethro) nor is nature of his priesthood. Because Midian and Israel were distant cousins as noted above, the former retained some monotheistic worship and perhaps sacrifice whereas we hear nothing of the sort among the Israelites during their four century long sojourn in Egypt. One tradition that may have fed into Jethro’s priesthood was the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham which occurred two chapters prior to mention of Midian’s connection

through Abraham. Also the sacrifices Abraham had performed became part of Midian's tradition, having sprung from Keturah, Abraham's second wife. As for Midian, it was easier for this people to retain its ancient traditions, fairly isolated in the desert, while at the same time retaining vigorous trade connections as with those traders who bought Joseph. In other words, they had the best of both worlds: isolation and a position right on the doorstep of Egypt.

Selah

So when the seven daughters arrived at the well, "shepherds came and drove them away" [vs. 17] which shows just how precious water is in the desert. As with the recent case of Moses watching the Egyptian beat a Hebrew, he saw this and came to their aid. The verse at hand says that Moses "stood up and helped them," nothing more. Apparently his standing up (*qum*) was sufficient to scare off the shepherds who thought the seven daughters were an easy target to scare away. "When they came to their father Reuel, he said, 'How is it that you have come so soon today'" [vs. 18]? Apparently Reuel was the proper name for Jethro which means "excellency;" regardless, we are not dealing with two separate persons. The seven daughters of Reuel/Jethro ran off excitedly to tell their father the good news, that a stranger helped them, but they returned without carry water, hence the question. They identified Moses as an Egyptian who drew water and watered the flock, words that must have delighted Jethro. His identity came from clothing or some ornamentation; after all, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's court. Immediately Jethro summoned his daughters to fetch "the Egyptian" and have him eat supper that evening. As for the shepherds, they too recognized Moses was an Egyptian and were afraid that he might be part of an advanced raiding party, hence their haste to scatter.

Selah

"And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah" [vs. 21]. *Ya'al* is the verb for "was content" which fundamentally means to begin, to undertake an endeavor. The other meanings apply to Moses, for his dwelling in Midian set the stage for the crucial divine revelation about to follow. "That it would please god to crush me" [Job 6.9]! Zipporah is last mentioned in 18.2 when Moses sends her and his two sons away. Other than that we have no information about her though she must have brought comfort to Moses, essential to his being *ya'al*. Actually it was her father who thought that of all the seven daughters she would fit the bill for Moses. Vs. 22 mentions the birth of Moses' first son, Gershom, though no mention of his second son Eliezer's birth is mentioned. As for the derivation of Gershom, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land," *ger* being the word for "sojourner." In a way, Moses was a two-fold *ger*: his identity with "his people" in vs. 11 (i.e., not the Egyptians) and here in Midian. "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not their and will be slaves there (Egypt)" [Gen 15.13], words of the Lord to Abram.

Selah

"In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died." Such is the first sentence to vs. 23 which sounded like good news for both Moses and "his people." As for "many days," it is an indefinite period of time but obviously a long one, long enough for Moses to have settled down comfortably in Midian and offer time (hopefully) for memory of the murder he had committed to blow by. That memory seems to have been forgotten ('for all the men who were seeking your life are dead,' 4.19), and mention of these words from Jethro give a general idea of how long "those many days" had been.

Selah

Instead of showing joy at Pharaoh's death, vs. 23 continues in the second sentence, "And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God." Despite this, Moses must have entertained thoughts about his step-mother, the kindly woman who had rescued him from the Nile River. She remained alive well into the reign of the new Pharaoh and perhaps fell out of favor. Due to this and her connection with Moses as well as with his mother and sister Miriam, she decided to throw in her lot with the Israelites and eventually participated in the crossing of the Red Sea. Moses would make certain that she would be cared for well during those forty years of wandering when she must have passed away, not having made it to Canaan. The verb *'anach* translated as "groaned," the pronunciation alone being well suited for its meaning. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan" [Prov 29.2]. It's intensified by the preposition *min* used with "bondage," that is to say, "from (under) bondage." The crying which ensued must have been terrible, not unlike the cry of Abel's blood from the earth. In fact, the same verb *tsahaq* is used. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" [Gen 4.10].

Selah

As with the case of Abel's blood, "God heard (*shamah*) their groaning and remembered his covenant with

Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” [vs. 24]. Here *tsahaq* (cry) is transformed into *ne’aqah*; three other biblical references exist, one of which is found in 6.5 (same context) and another in Judg 2.18: “For the Lord was moved to pity by their groanings because of those who afflicted and oppressed them.” The power of *tsahaq* and *ne’aqah* were enough to make God remember...*zakar*...the covenant made with their three illustrious ancestors. As for *zakar*, it’s more than a simple recollection of the past; a noun derived from this verbal root (same spelling) is “a male” or the agent through whom the memorial of his parents and relatives even further back are continued into the present. So in the context of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and despite the centuries between when they had flourished and Israel in Egypt, the time gap is as nothing. Besides, Moses being a male (*zakar*) Israelite is a living memory (*zakar*) of the people destined not only to continue their heritage but to enhance it...not just Moses but Israel as a whole to which this verse refers specifically.

Selah

Vs. 25 continues with this theme of divine *zakar* and brings Chapter Two to a close: “And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.” Here emphasis shifts from hearing in vs. 24 to seeing, the first being indispensable to effect the latter. As for hearing, it’s closer to the situation compared with the more distant seeing. That means God went down to his people, albeit in disguise, for a better “hearing” before he takes action through Moses. The “place” from which God had seen the Israelites isn’t given but quickly becomes apparent. In between the hearing and seeing is the unifying factor of remembering (*zakar*). That means God was in their midst as inheritors of the *zakar* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. From this intermediary position of *zakar*, God then “saw” the people after he had heard them. To do so otherwise would have meant God was not faithful to Israel. Finally hearing-remembering-seeing is elevated into a divine knowing, *yadah* being the verb which means intimate association as noted in 1.8. The Hebrew text lacks “condition.” To *yadah* is sufficient and sets the stage for the first major divine revelation in many a generation, one that had been absent to Israel while in Egypt.

Selah

Chapter Three

“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian” [vs. 1]. This verse intimates that after having married Zipporah, he had settled down quite comfortably in Midian but most likely not making it his permanent abode. After all, Moses was outside Egypt in self-imposed exile away from his people yet at the same not terribly distant from both Canaan and the Sinai wilderness. He may have strayed into both areas at different times, thereby acquainting himself with them. It turned out he did visit the latter territory. Moses’ time of shepherding was especially valuable in the Midian area so he could know better the lay of the land and thus guide the Israelites there after their departure from Egypt. Vs. 1 continues with “and he came to Horeb, the mountain of God (*har ha’elohym*).” As for this title, note the definite article meaning “the God.” As for Horeb being so designated, it must have been in conjunction with the Midianites who seemed to worship the same God as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Word of that religion had drifted southward into Midian and took root there, fortunately so, in order to accommodate Moses many centuries later. Moses, by reason of being married into Jethro’s family, had a privileged place to observe the Midianite religion in action though he, being a foreigner, was forbidden to approach the mountain of God. So here was Moses all alone tending the flock. Actually he “led his flock” in that direction perhaps out of curiosity and the opportunity to at last behold this sacred place he had heard so much about. Perhaps those Midianite traders who had bought Joseph four centuries earlier brought word of Horeb into Egypt, reports of which later circulated among the Israelites when they were in bondage there. And so Horeb assumed almost myth-like proportions in their minds.

Selah

“And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” [vs. 2]. *Mal’ak* is the word for “angel” which fundamentally means a messenger, the first time one appears to an Israelite since Jacob in Gen 32.1 just before he encountered his brother, Esau. This tradition which was followed by Jacob wrestling with an unknown man (though not identified per se as *mal’ak*) had been kept alive among the Israelites in Egypt as well as other encounters Jacob had with heavenly beings. This messenger is “of the Lord” which makes him all the more important and indicates that the God worshiped by the Midianites and Israelites was the same deity. Perhaps it was the same angel who later “went before the host of Israel” just before crossing the Red Sea (14.19). As for the verb “appeared,” it is the common *ra’ah* (to see) and situated within the context of a flame of fire. What form the angel took isn’t specified, for it must have been something Moses had no

problem identifying as a divine *mal'ak*. This *mal'ak* appeared *in* a flame *out of* a bush which differs from the Lord himself and who does not assume a form.

Selah

Perhaps the sight made Moses think of the cherubim at the entrance to the garden of Eden as well as “a flaming sword which turned every way” [Gen 3.24]. As for “bush,” the noun is *seneh* or a thornbush typical of deserts and occurs only in this context with the exception of Dt 33.16: “with the best gifts of the earth and its fulness and the favor of him that dwelt in the bush.” Because a *seneh* is exceptionally dry, it was no small wonder that Moses now wondered why it wasn’t being consumed, so in response to the angel appearing (*ra’ah*) here, Moses *ra’ah* this sight. Thus we have an angel/messenger and a burning thornbush, the former being seeing within the latter. That means Moses’ attention was caught more by the flame than the fire, for it was specific to the *mal'ak* who does not utter any words. In other words, this *mal'ak* (as messenger) communicates to Moses through sight. Without hesitation, Moses says to himself that he will turn aside and see (*ra’ah*) “this great sight” [vs. 3], the noun *mar’eh* being used which is derived from *ra’ah* and called “great” by reason of appearing during the bright, harsh light of the desert as opposed to night. After all, Moses was leading his flock and couldn’t do this at night. Turning aside suggests that Moses was en route somewhere with his flock or approaching Mount Horeb to get a better view of it. Thus the incident at hand prevents him from prematurely ascending the mountain, something reserved for later on.

Selah

“When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses’” [vs. 4]! Now it is the Lord’s turn to *ra’ah* which means he was paying close attention to Moses, whether or not he would approach the thornbush. *Ra’ah* on the Lord’s part implies that he had been watching him all along on his journey to Horeb. Spontaneously Moses said “Here I am,” probably thinking it was the angel. And so the thornbush contained both the angel and the Lord, the former making himself known by sight and the latter (true to the character of earlier divine revelations) by voice. The Lord forbade Moses to approach: “Put off your shoes (i.e., sandals) from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” [vs. 5]. This verse echos Jos 5.15: “Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.” Moses (the same applies to Joshua) had been standing on holy ground without knowing it. More specifically, the word *maqom* is used (place) which often designates an inhabited place. “Who shall stand in his holy place” [Ps 24.3]? Use of *maqom* suggests that Moses had been wandering around with his flock and once hitting upon Mount Horeb, had entered a piece of ground (*admah* or earth) that was holy or *qodesh* (an adjective fundamentally meaning to be pure, clean). So we have the generic ground placed within the confines of the restricted place (*maqom*). Somewhere was the separation between the not-holy ground and the one that was holy, a distinction of which Moses was ignorant. However, he must have sensed something different about the territory he had entered as he approached Horeb but couldn’t quite put his finger on it.

Selah

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” [vs. 6]. The Lord speaks like this, identifying himself with the first three ancestors who lived in Canaan, words which echoed a tradition familiar to Moses and the Israelites throughout their four century long stay in Egypt. And so the Lord put Moses at ease and made him recognize that indeed the earth upon which he was standing was holy. Actually Moses wasn’t far from Canaan and may have strayed there on occasion. If not that, then he must have come in contact with people living there, even distant descendants of Israel’s twelve sons who didn’t make the move into Egypt. One thinks of Dinah who had remained behind in Canaan. That makes the Lord’s identity with the three patriarchs all the more familiar to him. While the Lord was speaking his angel or messenger (*mal'ak*) was standing there alongside him within the thornbush not uttering a word. Both were in “the midst” (*mitok*) of the thornbush, occupying the same space, as it were (cf. vs. 2 and vs. 3). Moses wasn’t afraid to look at the spectacle before him but once he recognized the Lord within it, the same Lord who was unable to be seen but only heard, he “hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.” *Satar* is the verb for “hid” and connotes putting a veil over one’s face. “Hide me under the shadow of your wings” [Ps 17.8]. As for the verb “afraid,” it is *yare’* and gives rise to an impulse by Moses to hide his face, *ra’ah* (to see). In the verse at hand the two read *yar’e...lire’oth*, one flowing into the other, if you will. As for looking as it applies directly to God, the verb is *navat* which connotes a regard and respect. “Then I shall not be put shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments” [Ps 119.6].

Selah

Vs. 7 has yet another example of *ra’ah* which is concomitant with that of seeing Moses in vs. 4: “Then the Lord

said, 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings' (vs. 7 flows into the next one making the two as one verse). This taking notice is the first time the Lord had woken from an apparent sleep or indifference...he hadn't noticed the Israelites before during all those centuries when they had flourished in Egypt. Especially comforting to Moses were the words "my people" which correspond to "his people" as in 2.11, so he knew that God had identified himself with the Israelites as much as he had. Note that here the Lord has seen the affliction which corresponds to 2.25 though there "affliction" isn't mentioned, that word being *hony* which derives from *hanah*, a verbal root with a great variety of adaptations. Fundamentally *hanah* means to sing, answer, signify, be afflicted. "For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter" [2Kg 14.26]. The Lord responded in fairly swift fashion, for the Pharaoh under whom Moses was born—presumably the same Pharaoh from whom he fled after having murdered the Egyptian—was the only recorded tyrant during the four century-plus exile of Israel, not a bad record. Actually the misbehavior of the current Pharaoh was the impetus that got the Lord's attention, having been dormant since the days of Joseph. Note that the Lord says "my people who are in Egypt." That intimates some descendants of Dinah, the only daughter of Israel, had remained in the land of Canaan and carried on their traditions independently.

Selah

After having seen (i.e., the faculty of vision) this *hony*, the faculty of hearing comes into play: "and have heard." The noun *tshaqah* for "cry" derives from the verbal root *tsahaq* as last noted in 2.23, "and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God." The verb *nagas* has the participle form for "taskmasters" and alternately means to impel, urge. "They shall rule over their oppressors" [Is 14.2]. Finally we have in vs. 7 "I know their sufferings" with the verb *yadah* as at the conclusion of Chapter Two: "and God knew their condition. *Mak'ov* is the word for "sufferings as in Ps 38.17: "For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me." The intimacy of *yadah* in this second use (i.e., Exodus) takes the first one not just to conclusion but to climax, begging resolution.

Selah

"And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land." Here vs. 8 flows (in the **RSV**) from the previous verse thereby forming one sentence. The threefold gesture of God reaches climax in this, the fourth one. Note the text says "I have come down;" that is to say, already the Lord is present but the people don't know it. The only other biblical coming-down is just before the Lord confuses the language of the inhabitants on the land of Shinar thereby transforming it into Babel: "And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower" [Gen 11.5]. That incident involved the entire population engaged in a massive construction project, not unlike the one in which Israel is forced to labor, a sign that the Lord isn't partial to such colossal undertakings often reflecting a desire to usurp divine authority. As for the Genesis descent and the one at hand, both are preparations for the Real Coming Down in the person of Jesus Christ where the intimacy of *yadah* reaches its finest expression. Thus in the verse at hand, we have a fourfold movement by God: it begins with his seeing followed by his hearing, enhanced by his knowing and fulfilled by his coming down.

Selah

Now that the Lord has come down (at Mount Horeb, that is, where he will later appear to the Israelites), he prefers staying out in the wilderness for the moment. Of course, he has to invite Moses to become acquainted with him before proceeding further, for in this second descent the Lord has to get everything just right. *Natsal* is the verb for "deliver" which means alternately to pull away, to snatch...in other words, a fairly sudden gesture. "That he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine" [Ps 33.19]. It's one thing to snatch up and another to drop what you've snatched. The other half of this *natsal* is *halah* (to bring up) which is more than just a deliverance from Egypt and as noted above, had been exceptionally generous to Israel except for this last Pharaoh.

Selah

In vs. 8 the Lord describes the *'erets* or land to which he brings-up Israel as "a good and broad *'erets*, an *'erets* flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites." Description of the richness of the land sounds just great, perhaps just as great as Egypt had been for so long, but the Lord quickly modifies his words by mentioning six tribes for whom that place (*maqom*) was their native home. Chances are the all six tribes maintained some contact with Israel in Egypt, for the ties between them were too strong to be cut, even if these ties in many cases were fraught with tension. After all, the goal set out by the Lord when calling Abram was to subdue the place and take it over.

Although the early patriarch forbade intermarriage, certainly there must have been some if not many instances with family ties that reached back four centuries. The most favorable of the six tribes is the Hittites. Ephron the Hittite had struck a deal with Abraham to purchase land and a burial place for Sarah (Chapter 23), so the good relationship between these two men passed into Israelite tradition as a burial place for Sarah and later Abraham. So when the time (and at this stage it was unknown) came for the Israelites to leave Egypt, chances were that they would have one tribe sympathetic to them.

Selah

“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me” [vs. 9]. The people’s cry (*tshaqah* again) reaches the Lord not in heaven above but on earth (‘I have come down,’ vs. 8). Both terms “now” and “behold” are intended to grab the reader’s attention as to the genuine involvement of the Lord in human affairs. This is necessary because the divine presence required getting some used, having been un-experienced for so many years. That’s why later on the people had no idea of what Moses was speaking about when he introduced them to the Lord. In conjunction with vs. 7, the two facilities of hearing and seeing, they are repeated here not for repetition’s sake but to have the message sink into Moses, the primary bearer of divine intervention, that the Lord with whom he is speaking means business, not just talk. In Genesis the Lord had appeared to Abraham making promises about inheriting the land of Canaan over and over with so many apparent dead ends. Tradition picked them up as warning signals, that future descendants were to be wary about putting their faith in God, a fact the Lord desperately wants to avoid. With Abraham the Lord was elsewhere, if you will...not firmly on the earth as he is now with Moses. Besides, the Israelites have become entrenched so deeply in Egypt that they considered it home. Given divine intervention, it’s a wonder that Moses managed to get them out. Even if the current Pharaoh was treating them badly, that too would pass. Then again, there was a distinct possibility that popular opinion in Egypt had changed due to a successful propaganda program launched to enslave the Israelites.

Selah

Vs. 9 continues with a now familiar refrain: “I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.” Here the verb *lachsats* and the verb derived from it are used meaning to press, squeeze. “I will punish all who oppress them” [Jer 20]. As for this seeing noted here and earlier, it must have taken several occasions of close observation in order to assess the situation properly. After all, the Lord would not have taken the trouble to have come down and reveal to Moses that he was about to intervene. One must wonder what the Lord had been doing for over four hundred years. Although this is not appropriate to say, the thought does arise and is dealt with by proposition various theological contortions which fail to satisfy the question.

Selah

“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, of out Egypt” [vs. 10]. So after a fairly extended address to Moses about what the Lord intends to do concerning the Israelites, he changes the situation dramatically. The Lord is not going to intervene directly or in the physical sense; Moses is the one who, upon hearing these words, was the person designated for this task. The introductory, almost familiar “come” is the last thing Moses wanted to do. Rightly Moses objects in the next verse with “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt” [vs. 11]? The Lord responds—keep in mind it comes from a voice in the burning thornbush along with an angel—“But I will be with you” [vs. 12]. Up to this point Moses had sent himself into exile and lived among the Midianites, two cultures which acknowledged the Lord but in a vague sort of way where emphasis apparently lies upon tradition than genuine religious observances.

Selah

As for this being with you, Moses is too stunned to grasp the mode by which it will be expressed. The Lord foresees the difficulty which is why immediately he adds “and this shall be the sign for you,” *Oth* is the word for “sign” and can apply to something lying in the future. “Let them be for signs and seasons” [Gen 1.14]. As for the *’oth* at hand, it consists of Israel serving God “upon this mountain.” Note use of the word “serve” which is *havad*, the same term used in 1.13: “So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor.” Would the *havad* requested by the Lord be the same as this, the drudgery of a slave? Use of the term doesn’t sound attractive under these circumstances, so Moses has a lot of explanation to do to the Israelites. As for Mount Horeb, from Moses’ point of view, so far so good...but the Lord seems to be glossing over how Israel will get there. He speaks of it as a fait accompli (‘when you have brought for the people out of Egypt’). That’s what troubled Moses, the newly appointed leader. Since the Israelites apparently were clueless about worship, the task at hand seemed close to impossible. Their only resource was turning to Egyptian deities for some clues as

to its nature, even worship of some Pharaohs. In the meantime Moses was expected to focus upon that *'oth-*as-worship at Mount Horeb, not much comfort even though he was standing before the Lord. Would the Israelites end up by doing the same?

Selah

"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you'" [vs. 13]. Moses obviously poses the most direct question to the Lord he can muster. Although the Lord identified himself as "God of your fathers" in vs. 6, Moses wondered and did so with legitimacy whether the people would recognize the Lord as such. The reason for hesitancy is that the text is completely silent as to how (or even, if) the Israelites kept alive their monotheistic faith for so long, and that in the most sophisticated and polytheistic country of its time. Moses rightly proposed "and they ask me, 'What is his name?'" which means from first hand experience the Israelites had a tenuous grasp of the situation. Such questioning is a preface of sorts to a major revelation of God which follows next.

Selah

"God said to Moses, 'I am who am'" [vs. 14] which transliterates as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. These words are amazing at how open the Lord is, not at all afraid to reveal himself in a matter-of-fact manner. The first and second words mean "existed" or "was," the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as "I will (shall) be." While interpretation of this has been debated and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun "who," *'asher*, which bridges the gap between the two "existings." By its very nature, a relative pronoun connects two distinct elements. At the same time it represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. With this in mind, the quicker the relative pronoun makes the transition, the better, and less attention is drawn to it. However, the first half (in this case *'ehyeh*) could never make the switch to the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun *'asher*. Interestingly, the verbal root means to be straight, to prosper, be happy. It is the opening word of the Psalter: "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" where the adjective for "happy" is *'esher*. With this in mind, blessedness can be described as something you can't quite get your hands upon (you'd ruin it otherwise) because it's too slippery, goes by you too quickly. The reason? Your attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point A and Point B. But once you've put attention on the middle...the *'asher*...you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar YHWH, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself. As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. For Moses' part, he deserves special credit for having taken all this in stride. The Lord abbreviates *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words "Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" That is to say, "*'ehyeh* has sent me"...*'ehyeh* without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

Selah

Vs. 15 has the Lord refining his (abbreviated) name of *'ehyeh* in more familiar terms immediately after *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, that is, he being the God of Israel's fathers specified as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Note that the Lord identifies himself with each patriarch individually, not collectively, a way of drilling in the fact that indeed he means business. Hopefully this would arouse first their curiosity and then their allegiance to Moses. Looking back upon encounters all three patriarchs had with the Lord shows that no such name as the one revealed to Moses had been given. Now it is time to take it one crucial step further and see if Moses could have the Israelites put two and two together, the divine name and the Lord of their forefathers' memory. The *'ehyeh* part can wait until Mount Horeb. The next part of the divine commission to Moses is "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Note the distinction: the Lord's name is forever or for all eternity with this eternity mirrored in human history, "generations" (the Hebrew text reads literally 'to generation generation'). That means starting with Moses and the Israelites currently in Egypt the Lord's name will be imparted. Once imbued with it, they will pass it on to the next generation or those who will be born in the Sinai wilderness. In a sense, the second generation is more difficult to train because they are one step removed from the initial impulse. That's why forty years in the desert is necessary for appreciation of the divine *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Once that second generation has had time to reflect upon it, they were in a stronger position, even more than the first generation, to impart it to the third and so forth or those who would reside in the land of Canaan.

Selah

“Go and gather the elders of Israel together” [vs. 16]. The Lord had taken into account the fact that Pharaoh who had begun afflicting Israel had died (cf. 2.33) and attention had turned elsewhere, away from seeking the death of Moses. That’s why he bids Moses to return to Egypt. Once Moses had assembled the elders, he is to communicate his encounter with the Lord who had identified himself with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The elders were responsible for organizing the Israelites as well as keeping alive the tradition for all those centuries. If they concurred with Moses’ revelation, it would be easier to get everyone on board with the same message. They, not Moses, would transmit the Lord’s words “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt.” While Moses was virtually unknown to the Israelites, the people had their elders’ backing of this obscure person claiming to have had direct divine revelation. Here the act of hearing and seeing of Israel’s plight mentioned above assumes greater urgency by the word *paqad* for “have observed.” This noun, widely used, has multiple means, but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action. “The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised” [Gen 21.1]. Surely the elders were familiar with that incident in their religious heritage if not some of the people. Referencing the current *paqad* would thus make sense and help win over many. Note the passive: “what has been done to you,” leaving out the source of distress which everyone attributed to the recently deceased Pharaoh and his cohorts and was continued by his successor (the only two recorded kings who maltreated the Israelites for over four hundred years). Thus a tacit distinction is made between officials and the Egyptian people with whom the Israelites were on generally good terms.

Selah

Vs. 17 follows as part of the previous verse with “and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt.” The RSV has for the Hebrew “promise” the words “and I say,” suggesting that anything the Lord utters is as good as a promise. Even mention of *halah* (‘bring up’) is a clue that the Israelites will head northeast from Egypt into Canaan as opposed to other directions. More specifically, the *halah* at hand is used in conjunction with “the affliction (*hony*) of Egypt as seen in vs. 7: “I have seen the *hony* of my people who are in Egypt.” In the same breath the Lord adds “to the land of the Canaanites, the Hitties (etc.),” repeating vs. 8 along with that land flowing with milk and honey.

Selah

“And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt” [vs. 18]. These words give heart to Moses, that the elders will first listen to him and accompany him to the king of Egypt. At the same time he knew of the current Pharaoh’s hostility to the Israelites and that persuading him would not be easy, let alone getting an audience. Their words to him which they are simply to repeat in his presence? “The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us.” Perhaps this Pharaoh, not unlike his predecessors, had heard of the Lord, a tradition going all the way back to Joseph whose faith in the same divinity had rescued Egypt from famine. Even though later (Egyptian) generations may have erased that from their tradition, some traces of it must have survived, at least by hearsay among the existing Israelite population. But as has been noted several times, we have no record in Exodus that the Israelites were aware of their tradition originating with Joseph, Israel and the eleven brothers.

Selah

The verb for “met” (i.e., the Lord with ‘us’) is *qarah* as in Gen 42.29: “They told him all that had befallen them.” *Qarah* has a more expanded meaning than just meeting but of coming together where a future course of action is decided upon. The sense of this “meeting” is intensified by addition of the preposition *hal* (upon), “upon us.” The Lord himself adds “us” which literally is not true; to date he *qarah* only with Moses. However, the expanded notion of this verb means that Moses’ *qarah* with the Lord automatically extends to the elders; in other words, it has the same impact not unlike at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon (i.e., the *hal* associated with *qarah* just mentioned) the disciples as well as others present with them.

Selah

Vs. 18 continues with “and now, we pray you, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.” “We pray you” in Hebrew is rendered as *na’*, a particle used to show a submissive attitude and the making of requests which here is connected with the verb “to go,” *halak* (*nelakah-na’* being the form). The succinctness of *na’* at the end of a verb like this also has a sense of urgency as well as pleading for the request to be granted which is clear by its pronunciation after the verb at hand. The period of three days is reasonable but can have intimations of Israel’s intent to break away from Egypt. Once in the desert, it would difficult to track down the Israelites who might ally themselves with the Midianites and

other local tribes who knew the wilderness well. Also mention of sacrifice sounds suspicious; that means the taking of livestock which could be a guise to sneak out as many animals as possible. As for sacrifice, chances are Moses, the elders and Israelites had a vague notion of what it meant, coming down in tradition from the three patriarchs. Hopefully the Lord would reveal details about it later on. So despite the possibility the Israelites might use their request for a three day journey as an escape, in the end it seems a reasonable request.

Selah

“I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand” or literally, “no, not by a mighty hand” [vs. 19]. Another used of the verb *yadah* suggestive of intimate, first-hand knowledge, this time about Pharaoh. The Lord garnered this information primarily from the Israelites upon whom he had trained his eyes and hears. *Chazaq* is the adjective for “mighty” which derives from the verbal root meaning to tie, fasten, bind. “With a strong hand and an outstretched arm” [Ps 136.12].

Selah

“So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it.” [vs. 20]. That is to say, the Lord will stretch out (*shalach*) his arm which, as just noted, is *chazaq* or mighty. *Shalach* is the common verb “to send” and implies that the divine arm won’t be extended like a crane from Mount Horeb all the way into Egypt but will manifest itself primarily through the *shalach*—the sending—of Moses and the elders. The purpose of this *shalach*? To smite or *nakah* which does not necessarily involve slaying but a striking as in Ps 3.7: “For you smite all my enemies on the cheek.” Furthermore, *nakah* assumes the definite form of wonders or *pala’* (participle), a verb which fundamentally means to separate, distinguish. “And tell of all your wondrous works” [Ps 26.7]. As for what these wondrous works are, Moses hasn’t a clue; besides, he will partake in many of them. Vs. 20 concludes with “after that he will let you go.” That is to say, a more common use of the verb *shalach*; it is as though once having felt the divine *shalach*, Pharaoh will use his own arm to *shalach* the Israelites.

Selah

“And I will give this people favor in the sight (i.e., ‘in the eyes’) of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty” [vs. 21]. *Chen* is the noun for “favor” which also applies to grace and beauty. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor” [Ps 84.11]. This *chen* is spelled out in the next verse as something effected in plain sight of the Egyptians who as had been noted, live up and down the Nile River. As for this not going empty (*reyq*: also means vain), it is the Israelite women who will be play a key role as vs. 21 flows into the next one as follows: “but each woman shall ask of her neighbor and of her who sojourns in her house, jewelry of silver and of gold and clothing.” This is the first time a sojourner with the Israelites is mentioned, *gor* being the verb. “You shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you” [Lev 16.29]. *Gor* (here applied to women simply by reason of the jewelry) intimates that people—either native Egyptians or even those from Canaan who heard about Israel’s success and decided to come down—had been attaching themselves to the Israelites. Though not explicit, chances are it was due to the attractiveness of their worship of the Lord.

Selah

And so Chapter Three ends on a positive note which will require some time and much effort to realize, namely, “thus you shall despoil the Egyptians.” *Natsal* is the verb at hand and was mentioned in vs. 8, namely, the Lord delivering Israel from Egypt. The verse at hand foreshadows 12.33-36 (“Thus they despoiled the Egyptians,’ vs. 36). Note that the jewelry taken is deliberately given to the Israelite youths, boys and girls alike. This is a way of insulting the Egyptians, that the youngest among the Israelites were now wearing their most valuable possessions. However, this isn’t what we would consider despoiling because the Egyptians willingly gave away their precious items. The *natsal* involved seems to be the rapidity and eagerness with which they did this, anything to get rid of the Israelites as soon as possible after the death of the first born of the Egyptians.

Selah

Chapter Four

This chapter opens with the rather matter-of-fact words, “Then Moses answered.” That is to say, he answers the Lord who had revealed his divine name and goes into some detail about his plan for deliverance of the Israelites. It is a simple sentence indicative of the ready spirit on Moses’ part which later reaches its fullest development in 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” As for the answer, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not

appear to you.” In this instance “but” is the connective *w-* (also as ‘and’) prefaced to *hen* or “behold” which is similar to *hineh* of 1.10 and used in virtually every sentence of both Genesis and Exodus to show continuous action. Note that Moses says first the people won’t believe and then they won’t listen to his voice. Usually it’s the other way around, listening followed by believing or the lack thereof. However, Moses seems to be relying upon the testimony of the elders on his behalf which hopefully will set the stage for him to spread word about his encounter with the Lord. In back of his mind was how to communicate the name of the Lord revealed in 3.14 and for a divinity by that previously unheard of name to deliver them from the Egyptians. Surely the people’s response (‘The Lord did not appear to you’) sounds reasonable in this light. As for the verb at hand, it’s *rahaḥ*, the common verb to see.

Selah

With equal matter-of-factness the Lord responds “What is that in your hand” [vs. 2]? Reference is to a rod or *mateh* which can also apply to a branch or twig and most likely here refers to a shepherd’s staff. Throughout the Book of Numbers (chapters one, two, seven and thirteen) *mateh* refers to the various tribes of Israel. For another reference, see Is 14.5: “The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked.” The Lord bids Moses to cast the *mateh* upon the ground which turned into a serpent, causing Moses to run away in fright. *Nachash* is the word for “serpent” as in the garden of Eden. Later Moses would use an image of this *nachash* to heal the Israelites who were bitten by fiery serpents: “So Moses made a bronze serpent and sit it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live” [Num 21.9]. In the verse at hand, Moses was reminded immediately of how this *nachash* had deceived the first woman but soon was to become an intermediary between her succumbing to the serpent and the healing of the damage done, an image taken up by Jesus Christ in 3.14.

Selah

“That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.” These words of vs. 5 continue the previous verse forming one and have the feel of an appendix to the previous verse where Moses grasps the serpent’s tail. *Lemahan* (‘that’ or ‘in order that’) which begins vs. 5 convey this. However, the changing of the rod into a snake and *visa versa* which will be repeated later in Pharaoh’s court, is confined to those present in that place, not the Israelites, as intimated by the verse at hand. Then again, vs. 5 reads “That (*lemahan*) they may believe.” “They” is not specified and thus could apply to the Egyptian officials and magicians. Note that the Lord identifies himself three separate times in accord with each of the three patriarchs, not lumping them all together as in 3.16. However, there it begins with “the God of your fathers” compared with here, “the God of their fathers.” This intimates that in the verse at hand the Lord is referring to the Egyptians.

Selah

“Again, the Lord said to him, ‘Put your hand into your bosom’” [vs. 6]. *Hod* or “again” serves to connect the serpent incident to a new sign, thereby allowing no temporal gap between the two events which must have been trying for Moses. This time Moses puts his hand upon his chest (*cheyq*) which he did unhesitatingly. Once he removed it, his hand “was leprous, as white as snow” [vs. 6]. *Tsarah* is the verb meaning “was leprous” and fundamentally means to strike down in the sense of scourge, an apt description of leprosy. “Miriam became leprous” [Num 12.10]. Moses doesn’t seem phased by this because he trusted the Lord who told him to return his hand upon his bosom after which the leprosy vanished. The striking incident, is designated as a sign (*’oth*: also refers to a portent). “When he wrought his signs in Egypt and his miracles in the fields of Zoan” [Ps 78.43]. As for this *’oth* and that of the serpent, the Lord says “If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the latter sign” [vs. 8]. The word for “heed” is *shamah*, the common verb for “to hear” which here is presented as one of two options: either heeding or believing which amount to the same thing but with slightly different accents.

Selah

The Lord now gives a third *’oth* or sign provided the first two do not elicit a response: “and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground” [vs. 9]. The precise point at which the water—and the Nile forms a narrow band of life from south to north in Egypt, the rest being desert—changes into blood is not mentioned precisely. It seems the transformation occurs when the water hits the dry ground not just absorbing the blood but leaving an ugly brownish blotch on the sand. Of the three signs, the third is the most ominous because it threatens the very source of Egypt’s life. While this isn’t connected with the shedding of Abel’s blood, it is reminiscent of it: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” [Gen 4.10].

Selah

“But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent either heretofore or since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue” [vs. 10]. Such words are neither an objection nor a way to wiggle out of the task laid upon him but due to a genuine inability to articulate himself properly. That’s why later Moses’ brother Aaron becomes his spokesman. Note the two parts of this objection: 1) for the adjective “eloquent,” the Hebrew is “not a man of words.” Moses really attempts to get off the hook with the qualifiers “heretofore or since” or covering the past and making excuses for the future. 2) “slow of speech” or *kevad* in the negative sense as noted in Gen 12:10: “for the famine was severe in the land.” This “severity” with regard to speaking applies to Moses’ tongue which seems to refer to his ability to express himself, the first “severity” being applicable to difficulty in articulation itself. Despite efforts to get away from the divine task entrusted to him, the Lord counters immediately with “Who has made man’s mouth” [vs. 11]? Also included is making a person deaf, bestowing sight and removing it. “Is it not I, the Lord?”

Selah

“Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” [vs. 12]. The Lord doesn’t allow Moses to get a word in after his complaint but dismisses him right away. Note that the Lord will be not so much with Moses but with his mouth where he will take his place, as it were, and teach him what to say. The verb for “teach” is *yarah* (it forms the verbal root for Torah) alternately meaning to lay foundations, cast, sprinkle with water. “I have taught you the way of wisdom” [Prov 4:11]. Still this isn’t enough. One has to credit Moses for his persistency in the divine presence: “Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person” [vs. 13]. The verb *shalach* is used twice, the second literally reading as “by the hand you send.”

Selah

“Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses” [vs. 14] with *charah* being the verb. “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak” [Gen 18:30]. We can presume that though Moses was afraid, he stood his ground, believing that what he had said about his limitations was true. This divine *charah* took the form of the Lord continuing with “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite?” This tribe later became associated with Israel’s priestly caste but as of yet had the least desirable reputation going back to Jacob’s blessing (Simeon included): “O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company” [Gen 49:6]. This must have come as a surprise to Moses, long absent from his native Egypt, and surprised him that the Lord singled out Aaron. It is the first mention of Moses’ brother, perhaps a leader of the Israelite community there already renowned for his ability to speak in public. The literal text in Hebrew of “I know that he can speak well” reads “speaking he speaks,” *davar* being the verb. Apparently the Lord has summoned Aaron to visit Moses in Midian, for “behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart” [vs. 14]. As for the actual going out of Aaron, it isn’t mentioned specifically until vs. 27 when the Lord commands him to “go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” But before the two brothers meet, the Lord had to continue persuading Moses.

Selah

The first part of vs. 15 runs “And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth.” First comes the Lord speaking (*davar*) after which he puts this speaking (*davar*, noun) into the mouth of Aaron. How that will happen isn’t spelled out but left to Moses. Already we’ve seen quite a bit of this divine *davar* including revelation of the Lord’s proper name, but we are clueless as how it will be inserted into Aaron’s mouth. As for the actual transmission, see vs. 28: “And Moses told all the words of the Lord with which he had charged him to do.” There the verb “told” is not *davar* but *nagad* which connotes a note of showing or putting in front. “Ask your father and he will show you” [Dt 32:7]. As for *nagad* in the context of vs. 28, it will be dealt with at the appropriate time, but it consists in large part of that putting (*sum*) of the verse at hand.

Selah

Vs. 15 continues “and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do.” All this emphasis upon mouth shows just how important it is to communicate properly to the Israelites who have been away from their native land some four hundred plus years. Many people may even have forgotten it and learned to consider Egypt their homeland despite the current trying experiences. So when the Lord claims to “be with your mouth” as well as Aaron’s, that means *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh* or “I am who am” will do the speaking, unique by any standards. As for the divine teaching, the verb is *yarah* as in vs. 12. There it was with regard to what Moses “shall speak” whereas here it concerns “what you will do,” the latter putting emphasis upon action.

Selah

“He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” [vs. 16]. Two preposition in the Hebrew text read literally as “to you” (*l* being prefixed to ‘you’) and “to the people” (*el*). The former suggests on “behalf of” and the latter, “because of,” direction towards-which. So the act of speaking...*davar*...by Aaron is on behalf of Moses and the act of being Moses’ mouth is “to” him, that is, with constant reference to Moses as the principle mediator between the Lord and Israel. As for the preposition *l*, it is used literally as “to God,” Moses being “to” Aaron in the same fashion as the Lord related to Moses. All this interaction between the Lord, Moses and Aaron is, of course, vital, but the Lord takes into consideration (much as Jesus would do later on) the need for Israel to witness signs and miracles. That’s why the Lord bids Moses in vs. 17 to take the rod which had turned into a serpent.

Selah

After the fairly long encounter with the Lord, Moses returns to Jethro, his father-in-law, and asks permission to return to his “kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive” [vs. 18]. Here he calls the Israelites “kinsmen” or in Hebrew, “brothers,” compared with earlier appellations of “my people.” That means the bond between him and them is on firmer ground after the Lord had revealed himself. Although he was married to Jethro’s daughter Zipporah and had two sons by her, Moses takes leave of them in favor of his “brothers.” Though the three aren’t mentioned later, they did accompany Moses to Egypt (cf. vs 20). They, like the wife of Joseph, were important on a personal level but not so in the grander scheme of things. Interestingly, after the Lord expressed repeated concern for Israel, Moses wonders aloud whether his people are alive or not. That reveals a lack of trust which had to be confirmed by seeing the Israelites first-hand. One would assume that word would reach Moses before and after his Mount Horeb experience as to their fate; if Pharaoh had succeeded in exterminating them, he would have known it fairly soon and remained in Midian. As for Moses’ request, Jethro responded simply “Go in peace” or go in *shalom* [vs. 18].

Selah

Jethro’s encouragement of Moses to go in *shalom* is followed by the Lord’s words, “Go back to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead” [vs. 19]. Up until vs. 18 the Lord and Moses were having an extended conversation which apparently came to a conclusion after which Moses returned to Jethro who concurred with the Lord’s words. Now at once or during the conversation between Jethro and Moses the Lord intervenes with words Moses was waiting for, namely, that those who sought his life had died. That means Moses had been with Jethro in Midian a considerable length of time. Possibly among those dead was the Pharaoh who had persecuted Israel, and that would make Moses’ task easier. At the time he didn’t know, but at this stage any enticement to get Moses back to Egypt was worth it, even if tinged by a white lie of sorts. Should some harbor a threat against Moses, his return with three native Midianites (Zipporah and her two sons) would have provided cover. They may have not been received with open arms among the Israelites but at least tolerated as belonging to Moses. As for Moses taking his family back into Egypt, vs. 20 is clear about the role of his rod called the “rod of God” [vs. 20]. This *mateh*, while always in the hand of Moses, never belonged to him and would play an important role later on.

Selah

“When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power” [vs. 21]. These words, like the ones the Lord had spoken after Jethro gave his permission, continue to show divine intervention in human affairs. As for this Pharaoh, it isn’t clear whether he was the same one who had afflicted Israel; possibly not, for he must have been included among “all the men who seek your life” [vs. 19]. The new Pharaoh and those around him were more concerned with using the Israelites in their service, not continuing to focus upon an obscure Hebrew who murdered an Egyptian years ago. As for the return to Egypt (this includes Moses trip to Midian), he must have taken the land route above the Red Sea or just below the Mediterranean, that is, directly into Goshen, that area of Egypt promised to Joseph and his descendants. A critical part of Egypt, to be sure, for it was right at the crossroads not only between Egypt and Canaan but between two continents, Africa and Asia. So when looking at Goshen on a map, it was no small wonder the Egyptians wished to enslave Israel and get her out of that area. The word for “miracles” which the Lord bade Moses is *mopheth* is similar to a sign or *’oth* but of a more spectacular nature, often applicable to a future event. For an example of both, “Who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants” [Ps 135:9]. These miracles were “put in your power” or literally, “in your hand” and that hand is the one which bore the *mateh* or staff.

Selah

Vs. 21 continues with a warning that the Pharaoh with whom Moses will relate is not benevolent: “but I will

harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.” This future hardening of heart (*chazaq* is the verb, even by its sound, is constricting. ‘They hold fast to their evil purposes,’ Ps 64.5) is a theme to be repeated often. Thus the constriction, so clear by the verb *chazaq*, means that Pharaoh will be immune to any divine signs and wonders. Presumably Moses will approach Moses with the request to let his people go, the first *chazaq*, if you will, followed by the second one in view of these signs and wonders.

Selah

Vs. 22 refines the request Moses is to make of Pharaoh, that is, by identifying Israel as “my first born son.” The people as a whole fall into that category, the first time these comforting words appear, thereby elevating the status of Israel to a single person, if you will, dear to the Lord. Not only is Pharaoh to let Israel-the-first-born-son depart Egypt, but he is “to serve me” [vs. 23], the verb being *havad*, the same one used to describe the forced labor at construction to which Israel was subjected. The Lord’s words conclude with “I will slay your first born son” and leaves it at that. We have no response from Moses but can intimate that at last the Lord means business. However, these introductory words warn that deliverance of Israel will not take place at once but after a series of signs and wonders aimed primarily at Egypt...not so much the people but Pharaoh and his court.

Selah

The action shifts from Midian to a lodging place en route to Egypt, the location being unidentified: “At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to kill him” [vs. 24]. The noun here is *malon*, one of seven other biblical references and can mean anything from a tent to a house, possibly the former in these circumstances. “And lay them (twelve stones) in the place where you lodge tonight” [Jos 4.3]. This desire on the Lord’s part to slay Moses reveals that he had second thoughts about the enterprise. If Moses were dead, then Israel would not be able to leave Egypt. The verb *pagash* (‘met’) alternately means to rush upon, attack, and is consistent with the verse at hand. It occurs three verses later with the Lord saying to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” For another reference, see Hos 13.8: “I will meet them as a bear.” Note that in vs. 24 the Lord sought to *pagash* Moses which means he was already at the lodging perhaps disguised as a traveler who had gone ahead, and was ready to pounce upon Moses. “Sought” (*baqash*: to search, seek for) means that the Lord took time to identify Moses from others at the inn.

Selah

While the Lord was ransacking the place, Zipporah, Moses’ wife, came to the rescue. She was awake while her husband was fast asleep when she detected an unwanted presence lurking about. Without hesitation Zipporah grabs a flint knife (*tsor*: one other biblical reference is used, Ezk 3.9: ‘Like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead’) and circumcises one of her two sons, whether it was Gershom or Eliezer (not mentioned until 18.4) is not given, and “touched Moses’ feet with it” [vs. 25]. “Feet” often is an euphemism for genitals which here implies that Moses was fast asleep without a clue as to what was transpiring. Zipporah yells out “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” As the Oxford **RSV** says in a footnote, “(this is) perhaps an old expression for a young man who was circumcised before marriage. Here it is assumed that the circumcision of the infant son was efficacious for Moses who was evidently uncircumcised.” Thus before actually realizing it, Moses’ sons and he were circumcised as the Lord was lurking around the lodging place in a desire to slay Moses. If it weren’t for Zipporah’s ability to recognize the Lord (and it is to her everlasting credit for having done so under the cover of darkness), Moses would not have made it to Egypt and Israel would continue to languish there for untold centuries to come.

Selah

“So he let him alone” [vs. 26]. The Hebrew text is more vivid: “And he loosened from him,” the verb being *raphah*, to cast down, leave off. “All hand shall be feeble” [Ezk 7.17]. Just as Moses awoke and before he realized what was transpiring, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the Lord rushing out the door into the darkness. It is from this point on that we lose track of Zipporah. Her task, quick and decisive as it had been, saved the day.

Selah

“The Lord said to Aaron, ‘Go into the wilderness to meet Moses’” [vs. 27]. Aaron had been in Egypt and wondered what happened to his brother since the slaying of that Egyptian many years ago. He could have thought that the Egyptian authorities eventually caught up with Moses and slew him or that he died wandering aimlessly in the Sinai wilderness. Thus for many years Aaron’s life was filled with incertitude and distress. As to the mode of the Lord’s communication, we have no details except that he spoke to him. Aaron was going about his usual business trying to mollify the Egyptian overseers on behalf of the Israelites, a task at which he

had become quite adept. Without knowing how or even when Aaron responded, the text simply says he got up and left on his own. God did not reveal the place where to meet Moses except in the wilderness, obviously a large space. To go there means that Aaron had to take sufficient supplies, even some men to accompany him. Then there was the problem of exiting Egypt: Aaron was well known among the Egyptians as a leader, so he had to make good his escape undetected. So without elaborating upon the terse communication from God in vs. 27, Aaron “went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.” The Israelites had a vague idea about this mountain identified with the Lord, that is, Mount Horeb. Although the interaction with Aaron was terse as already noted, it does not mean the content is equally terse or devoid of content. Aaron was given divine directions to this strange, mystical mountain that must have formed part of Israel’s folklore, though apparently no one seems to have gone there except Moses...and that was by necessity of fleeing Egypt for Midian.

Selah

As vs. 24 recounts, Moses and his family had stopped at a lodging inn en route from Midian to Egypt. Since Aaron was divinely instructed to meet his brother at Horeb, Moses must have made his way there first, even it meant taking a road other than the direct one into Egypt. He wanted to contact the Lord at the place where both first met, the burning thornbush, and see if he could restore confidence after that unnerving encounter at the inn. As for the kissing by Aaron of Moses, the verb is *nashaq* which alternately means to arrange, put in order. The idea is that when two things are lined up properly, they “kiss” each other. As for another quote, see Ps 2.12: “Kiss his feet lest he be angry and you perish.” As often the case, no details of such a momentous meeting are given; not because they are considered incidental, but the reader is invited to fill in the blanks and therefore participate more fully in the narrative.

Selah

“And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him and all the signs which he had charged him to do” [vs. 28]. *Nagad* is the verb for “told” (cf. vs. 15) which alternately means to be in front (*neged* is a common preposition derived from it), to proclaim or celebrate. Thus the sense is more elaborate than a simple telling. “And proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, that he has wrought it” [Ps 22.31]. The object of *nagad* consists of words (*davar*) which the Lord has spoken. To be sure, Moses excitedly included the Lord’s name, but when Aaron heard *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*, it solved the identity as to the same Lord who had spoken with him in vs. 27. No small wonder that this divine name had to be proclaimed...*nagad*...not just simply spoken. These words or *davar* were sent along with Moses, that is, Moses didn’t carry them physically but spiritually which meant that as soon as he hit upon Aaron they flowed out on their own, of course, by the action of *nagad*. The same spontaneity of communication (again via *nagad*) occurred with the signs (*‘oth*) charged upon Moses.

Selah

“And the people believed.” The first part of vs. 31 which follows upon the heels of the meeting between Moses and Aaron which as vs. 27 says, was in the wilderness far from any human habitation. The spacial-temporal gap between that meeting at “the mountain of God” and the people’s acceptance of Moses’ words is as nothing. The same applies to the inn where Moses and his family had spent that near fatal night. This lack of temporality has its roots in the *nagad* or proclamation of Moses to his brother along with the carrying of his words and signs. Because of this unique form of communication, all the Israelites within Egypt heard Moses simultaneously. Furthermore, the Egyptians right among whom they lived were deaf...impervious...to hearing any such divine communication.

Selah

Vs. 31 continues with: “And when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.” The verb for “visited” is *paqad* is used in 3.16 as “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt” meaning that already the Lord had been among the Israelites, albeit in disguise, as he had done before in Gen 11.5 “to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” That presence on earth had given the Lord first-hand information as to human actions and motivations, so he used it again by showing up in Egypt though no one had recognized him. It is precisely this *paqad* in conjunction with the Lord’s observation of Israel’s affliction that caused the two brothers to rejoice. Some people must have recognized the Lord among them though they weren’t quite certain who it was. It was enough, however, for word to spread that something unusual and wonderful was afoot which spread like wildfire, hence “the people believed.” As for the two words “bowed their heads” and “worshiped,” (*qadad* and *shachah*), both pertain to the act of inclining oneself down to the ground in reverence. So with the people

having believed in the Lord, the task of Moses and Aaron lay not so much with them but with Pharaoh. At least half the battle had been won though the second half would prove quite a struggle.

Selah

Chapter Five

“Afterwards Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh.” So begins the first audience with the ruler of Egypt which, as the brothers probably intimated, was doomed to failure. The word “afterwards” (*’achar*) is a kind of affirmation as to what the two were about to say and do, that is, it is backed up by the words of the concluding verse of Chapter Four, “And the people believed.” Furthermore, this unanimous confession of faith by Israel in the Lord bolstered the two brothers about any misfortune laying in the future. This opening verse of a new chapter has the verb *’amar* (to speak) in the third person plural signifying that both Moses and Aaron did the speaking. Aaron was the designated spokesman (cf. 4.16) yet Moses, by reason of being the one to whom the Lord revealed himself, must have said a thing or two; to remain silent would make him appear foolish, even ignorant. And so the words of the Lord to Moses about his brother as well as those of 4.12 (‘I will be with your [Moses] mouth and teach you what to speak’) are about to be implemented. Actually the words “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel” come from Aaron, not Moses, who was along more as an authority figure. Pharaoh must have known about Aaron due his prominent place among the Israelites, but Moses? He was a newcomer, someone who just came on the scene which indeed is true after having reside in Midian for so long. That may have been a secondary reason for Aaron to begin with “Thus says the Lord.”

Selah

Vs. 1 continues with “That they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness,” the reason why the brothers came to Pharaoh. While true and following divine instructions, this request was a disguise to get Israel out of Egypt, something that was outrightly forbidden to present Pharaoh. *Chagag* is the verb for “to hold a feast,” the first time it’s mentioned in Exodus and not commanded by the Lord directly but intimated, for he specifically asked “that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” [3.18]. This verb connotes dancing and thus a joyous occasion. “You shall keep a feast to the Lord” [Lev 23.39]. As for the noun “wilderness” (*midbar*) mentioned several times already, it derives from the verbal root *davar* which has several meanings as well as to lead or guide flocks in a pasture. Hence *midbar* suggests a place a of pasture as well as vegetation. Expanding *midbar* in light of its verbal root, perhaps “wilderness” could be taken as a place of speaking, a place set apart favored by the Lord and those chosen by him where he can communicate in an uninterrupted fashion. A prime example in the New Testament is, of course, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ himself who had spent forty days in the *midbar*.

Selah

“But who is the Lord that I should heed his voice and let Israel go” [vs. 2]? As noted earlier “but,” just like “and” in Hebrew is *w-* prefaced to the first word of a sentence indicative of continuous action. With this in mind, Pharaoh’s question, more as a rebuke, shows the close connection between his words and the previous verse which contained that request to let Israel go into the wilderness. So as soon as Moses and Aaron had spoken, Pharaoh responds in almost seamless fashion. The two brothers may have thought of identifying the Lord as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*, but that would be too much for him to bear and shut off any prospect of further communication. And so Pharaoh was right in his own way to question about the Lord. Indeed his words which follow in the same verse (‘I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go’) are exactly true. *Yadah* (to know) is suggestive of intimate, personal knowledge, more along the lines of acquaintance, and does not form part of Pharaoh’s world view.

Selah

“The God of the Hebrews has met us” [vs. 3] reads literally “has called (*qara*) upon (*hal*) us.” Here Moses and Aaron put *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* in terms easier for Pharaoh to grasp yet in dramatic fashion by use of *qara* as “has called” along with the weight of responsibility upon (*hal*) them. In other words, the burden is taken off the two brothers and shifted directly upon the Lord, they being his spokesmen. Vs. 3 continues with a refinement of their request which is more in line with the Lord’s original words of 3.18: “Let us go, we pray, a three day’s journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God.” As far as Pharaoh is concerned, he wouldn’t mind this sacrifice taking place in Egypt, even allowing Israel time off from their forced labor, provided they return to their labors at once. To loose so many people would put the Egyptian economy in jeopardy—for it was based now upon virtual slave labor—something which up until this point Pharaoh may not

have been fully aware of. Even the concluding words of vs. 3 ('lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword'), dramatic as they are, fail to move Pharaoh. As for the verb "fall upon," it is *pagah* which suggests a sudden rush as in an ambush with the intent to kill. "Lest the pursuers meet you" [Jos 2.16].

Selah

"Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens" [vs. 45]. Pharaoh's concern about his economic dependency upon the Israelites is revealed here clearly without the slightest interest in the Lord. After all, Pharaoh himself was held in reverence as a kind of divinity and perhaps had in back of his mind that the Lord would be a threat to his status. *Sevel* is the word for "burden" as noted in 2.11. The next verse continues Pharaoh's words with "Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!" Credit is due to Moses and Aaron for approaching the ruler of Egypt, the strongest man in the ancient world who, given what he might have done to them, treated them lightly. Their audience must have taken place early in the day, for vs. 6 says "The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen." *Nagas* (cf. 3.1) is the word for the former and *shoter* for the latter; *shoter* fundamentally means "to write," is used two other times in Exodus and refers to an officer or magistrate. It seems that a *shoter* would have under him one or more *nagas*, those designated with forcing the Israelites to do their work. "The elders of the people and offers over them" [Num 11.16].

Selah

The duty entrusted to the taskmasters and foremen? "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks which they made heretofore; you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it" [vs. 7]. As for the verb "lessen," it is *garah* meaning to scrape off, take away as in Jer 26.2: "Do not hold back a word." Up to now Pharaoh provided the essential binding element for bricks, straw, but not any longer. Those who brought it to the Israelites must have been Egyptians who did the gathering. As for the word "measure," it is *matkoneth* with four other biblical references, one of which is in Exodus. For another meaning, see 2 Chron 24.13 ('proper condition'): "And they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it." Vs. 7 continues with "Let them go and gather straw for themselves." At first this seems harsh—and it is an added burden—but the area from which straw could be gathered was from the narrow band of the fertile Nile River. Since the Israelites had pretty much spread throughout Egypt, it was not that difficult to organize the harvesting and gathering of straw within that narrow north-to-south area. Besides, the Nile offered easy transportation instead of over land.

Selah

Vs 8 continues with a fuller description of the order given by Pharaoh, that his underlings are to order the Israelites to continue with their daily quota of bricks in addition to gathering straw. "For they are idle; therefore they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'" As for the accusation of being lazy, the verb is *raphah* as noted in 4.26: "So he let him alone." The idea behind *raphah* is a slacking or casting down, so in the verse at hand it applies to people who have undertaken work but later became *raphah*. In the eyes of the Egyptian overlords such *raphah* is revealed by the Israelites' asking to make sacrifice to the Lord. So if the Lord was continuing to watch what was transpiring as noted in 3.7, this must have been quite insulting to him.

Selah

The royal decree relative to increasing work for the Israelites is concluded in vs. 9, that is, its communication to Moses and Aaron: "Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words." The words "that they may labor at it" reads literally "that they may do (*hasah*, the common verb compared with the more strenuous *havad*) in (*b-*) it." Though *hasah* is less harsh than *havad*, the preposition "in" intimates that the Israelites are to be identified with their labors to such a degree that they will have no time for anything else. *Shahah* is the verb for "pay (no) regard" and implies looking around and not concentrating upon the task at hand. For another use, see Ps 119.117: "That I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually." As for the phrase "lying words," it, like preposition "in" (*b-*) just noted. And these lying words are none other than the divine command issued first through Moses and then through Aaron about worshipping the Lord in the wilderness.

Selah

Vs. 9 concludes on a harsh note, not to be unexpected from Pharaoh, with no response from Moses and Aaron to him. Actually they had no choice in the matter. If it weren't for Aaron's role as leader of the Israelites, Pharaoh might have been tempted to either imprison or kill him. However, both brothers were allowed to leave the court and communicate to the people what had transpired. Although vs. 10 begins with the taskmasters and foremen of the people (also noted in vs. 6), they could have been Israelites who cut a deal

with their Egyptian masters). Their duty was not to waste a moment's time but to proclaim "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw'" [vs. 10]. This surprise announcement is followed immediately by a further decree that they are to gather straw for themselves without a diminishment in their current workload. Although the words "wherever you can find" uttered by the overlords has an air of disdain, secretly it is welcomed by the people who knew the best straw lay, as noted earlier, within the narrow confines of the Nile River and the transportation it offered. However, as later verses are to prove, their increased efficiency at both gathering straw and making bricks didn't satisfy their Egyptian masters who beat them all the more. As for now, the Israelites "were scattered abroad through all the land of Egypt" [vs. 12] to get this straw. *Puts* is the verb for "were scattered" and suggests a sudden outpouring. "The whirlwind shall scatter them" [Is 41.16]. Although the text reads that this *puts* occurs "through all the land" what it really means is north and south along the Nile. The taskmasters "were urgent" [vs. 13] or *'auts* which means they hastened the Israelites to get out and gather the straw. "And he who makes haste with his feet misses his way" [Prov 19.2].

Selah

"And the foremen of the people of Israel whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over the were beaten and were asked, 'Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today as hitherto' [vs. 14]? "Were beaten" is passive, punishment meted out by the Egyptians to Israelite overseers who reluctantly had to carry out orders. They, in turn, took it upon themselves to approach Pharaoh crying out to him, the verb being *tsahaq* as in 3.7. In that verse "taskmasters" is mentioned, but then the work had not been increased. Since that *tsahaq* came to the Lord's ears and the current one came to Pharaoh, surely the latter *tsahaq* must have reached the Lord's ears as well. Usually when approaching a supreme ruler all types of protocol is observed. However, the foremen were so bothered that they threw caution to the wind and figured that if Pharaoh killed them on the spot, it would not make any difference. At the same time they knew he relied upon Israelite labor to keep his economy going. The real boldness is manifested in vs. 16: "But the fault is in your own people." *Chata'* is the word (verb) for "fault" and also means sin: "I have sinned against the Lord" [9.27]. Originally this verb is applied to archery as missing the mark as in target practice. Although Pharaoh fires back with the now familiar claim of Israel being lazy (*raphah* as in vs. 8), he does not maltreat the foremen nor punish the people further. At least he seems to have seen the economic value at stake.

Selah

"The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight" [vs. 19]. The Hebrew is direct in its simplicity: "were in evil (*rah*)" meaning they had no option available except continue abiding with Pharaoh's harsh decree. These foremen had their own audience with Pharaoh because "they met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them" [vs. 20]. The two brothers were in some outside court anxiously waiting for their compatriots to exit, telling whether or not the audience was successful by the expression on their faces. Chances are this was during set time of day when Pharaoh heard all sorts of cases from both Egyptians and Israelites. To a casual onlooker, Moses and Aaron were just two more litigants, Israelites at that. While he'd prefer to do without the large number of Israelites, economic dependency upon them dictated they be heard, even grudgingly. The verb *pagah* is used for the verb "met" as in vs. 3 and suggests a sudden encounter, a falling upon. That means the two brothers were more than waiting for the foremen...they were ready to pounce upon them as soon as they recognized them coming out.

Selah

Since Moses and Aaron could tell from afar the result of the meeting with Pharaoh, even though they individually knew it was bound to fail, the text moves into what they had expected and perhaps even had rehearsed, that is, to accept: "The Lord look upon you and judge because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us" [vs. 21]. The words "made offensive" consist of *ba'ash* (to have a bad smell) and *reyach* (smell; akin to *ruach* or spirit, breath). The phrase reads "you have made our scent/smell odious," odious in the sense of foul-smelling. These words reveal that the foremen considered themselves as a kind of burnt offering or incense offered to Pharaoh with good intent, but their scent turned out as disgusting to him. As for a sword in the hand of Pharaoh and his courtiers, it may have been true literally which shows how tense the meeting had been.

Selah

Without responding to the foremen, Moses "turned again to the Lord" [vs. 22]. *Yashav* is the verb and here intimates that Moses simply turned his back on the foremen right there in the courtyard before everyone else. "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?" This is the closest to despair Moses had gotten, having forgotten completely the divine promise not long ago, "that you may bring forth my

people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" [3.10]. After this two-fold complaint Moses continues lamenting about what Pharaoh had done, even worse, that "you (the Lord) have not delivered your people" [vs. 23]. *Natsal* is the verb for "delivered" which may be taken in a two-fold sense: 3.8 and 3/22 as "you shall despoil the Egyptians." Certainly not a good way to end an audience with Pharaoh but as mentioned above, not completely unpredictable. The desperate situation, however, sets the stage for the Lord to speak his mind.
Selah

Chapter Six

The first verse of this new chapter begins as though there is no time gap between it and the closing verse of Chapter Five: "But the Lord said to Moses" where *w-* prefaced to "said" is taken either as "but" or "and" to show continuous action, a fact pointed out above. What the Lord says now continues through vs. 13, a repeat of much of what he had expressed earlier in Chapter Four. The major difference: the words at hand come after the first encounter of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh. That means they have greater impact in face of what they are now up against. "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh," words intimating a certain eagerness and even thrill as to what the Lord will accomplish in the future, here clearly distinguishing between the ruler of Egypt and the Egyptian people as a whole. To date Moses had the idea that the Lord will take Israel from Egypt; it is Pharaoh who will be the unwilling agent: "for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land." *Garash* is the verb for "will send out" meaning to expel as well as to plunder. "The shepherds came and drove them away." Addition of "his land" means that Pharaoh always considered the Israelites as long term residents-turned-intruders despite their vital contribution to Egypt's economy. Again, it is helpful to keep in mind that this Pharaoh and his predecessor became hostile to the Israelites within their borders; prior to that, they had enjoyed a long, productive existence ever since Joseph was second in command.

Selah

After these introductory words to catch Moses' attention (note that he doesn't speak to Aaron), he says that he "appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty" [vs. 3]. *Ra'ah* is the verb at hand which was used last in 4.5: "that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you." There "God" is identified separately with each of the three patriarchs whereas here it is in abbreviated form, if you will. However, the verse at hand adds "God Almighty" *El Shaddai* as in Gen 17.1 which means God Most Powerful. The Lord himself makes clear the distinction: "but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them." So while the Lord appeared (*ra'ah*) to the three patriarchs of old (Jacob was the best known by reason of his son Joseph who had become renowned in Egypt), he did not make himself known as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* as was the case with Moses. That task was up to Moses and Aaron, to make the Lord known, *yadah* as implying intimate knowledge and acquaintance.

Selah

"I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners" [vs. 4]. Covenant (*beryth*: suggests a cutting) was used last in 2.24: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob." Again, note the three patriarch, all of whom received various types of covenants while in Canaan, a fact which the Lord wishes to make clear in the verse at hand. The purpose of this frequent mention of covenant is that if the Israelites cannot grasp the Lord as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, they will recall their heritage which kept them together as a distinct people for over four hundred years in Egypt. Use of the verb "dwelt as sojourners" (*gur*) is a bit ironic...while true, the Israelites in Egypt are sojourners though they were unaware of it. When they hear this statement, would they be able to identify themselves with their patriarchs and wish to return to a *gur* status in a foreign land (Canaan)? Later on when in the Sinai wilderness they would struggle with this question, wanting to return to Egypt where they had plenty of food despite the harsh conditions of labor. "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onion and the garlic" [Num 11.5]. The Lord seems to have second thoughts, if you will, on which he had just uttered by reminding the people that "I have heard the groanings of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant" [vs. 5]. This verse pretty much echos that of 2.24.

Selah

"Say therefore to the people of Israel" [vs. 6]. This "saying" will be easy for Moses to accomplish, for he will express it through the mouthpiece of Aaron who has had much greater familiarity with the Israelites while his

brother was off in Midian for so many years. The first divine statement is “I am the Lord” who identified himself as *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*; for sure, that will require some explanation. However, the Lord realizes this and expresses himself in terms of doing signs and wonders instead of explaining his name means. Note how important it is to have the Israelites know the identity of the Lord, much more so in the long run compared to their current situation, deplorable as it may be. Given their servile condition, no one was inclined to ponder theological niceties. The first order of business is for Israel to come out from beneath the burdens which the Egyptians set upon them, deliverance from their bondage, redemption with an outstretched arm (etc.) and finally in vs. 7, “I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God (etc).” Do the Israelites know what it means to be redeemed, *ga’al*, the first mention of this here in Exodus? It must have been unfamiliar, even alien, so they must have pondered considerably about this *ga’al* which fundamentally means a buying back. “The angel who has redeemed me from all evil” [Gen 48.16]. This is the only time *ga’al* occurs in Genesis, uttered by Jacob, and possibly worked itself into tradition once Israel arrived in Egypt. Jacob (i.e., Israel) speaks of *ga’al* as having been done by an angel, not the Lord, so that was an important reason why the Lord had to lay stress on who he was right from the beginning. With regard to taking Israel for “my people,” the text has two occasions of the preposition *l-* prefaced to two words which read literally, “to me” and “to people.” The same applies with “to you” and “to God.” Once these sets where “to” is used twice, the people will know (*yadah* as intimate knowledge) that “I am the Lord your God.” *Morashah* is the noun for “possession” with eight other biblical references, seven being from Ezekiel. “Unto us is this land given in possession” [Ezk 11.15].

Selah

“Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage” [vs. 10]. This verse begins with no mention of a time gap between Moses speaking to the people and the Lord’s address to him, the two being one and the same. Although Moses did as the Lord had commanded, the people didn’t care...not so much because they weren’t interested but because they were overwhelmed by their harsh circumstances. *Ruach* is the noun for “spirit” (singular, to show the collective nature of the people) which had been “broken” or *qotser*; a noun (the only one in the Bible) which derives from the verbal root meaning to reap, harvest, be short and can translate as “anguish (of spirit).” As for “bondage” *havodah* is the word as found in 1.13: “and made their lives bitter with hard service.” In sum, the Israelites prefer their slave-like plight over the unknown. Better to keep what you know, even if painful, instead of following some virtually unknown fellow, absent in Midian for many years without first hand knowledge of their situation, who claimed revelation of a God with a strange, almost incomprehensible name.

Selah

So instead of the Lord telling Moses to reason with the people he bids him to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart Egypt (cf. vs. 10). In the verse at hand the Lord first “said to Moses,” that is, using the verb *davar* followed by “tell Pharaoh,” *davar* again. It is as though the first (divine) *davar* spilled over automatically through Moses to Pharaoh, hoping that Pharaoh gets the message. Such *davar* is not a polite request but a statement-of-fact. It, in turn, is followed by another *davar* (‘But Moses said to the Lord’), this time a kind of rebuke by Moses to the Lord: “Behold the people of Israel have not listened to me” [vs. 12]. This statement is followed by a question in the same verse, “How then shall Pharaoh listen to me who am a man of uncircumcised lips?” The for “uncircumcised” is *hara*, this the first time the idea of circumcision being mentioned in Exodus. If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity” [Lev 26.41]. This is close to the sentiment of Is 6.5: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” After this legitimate objection the Lord speaks not just to Moses but to Aaron in vs. 13 though his direct words are not cited. The words consist of “and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” Here the Lord fleshed out in greater detail what the two brothers were to say as well as offering them encouragement. Such a conversation was broader in scope, more a familiar exchange as among friends. While important, only the bare fact is stated, that both Israel and Pharaoh are to obey a charge laid against them, that is to say, the verb *tsavah* is used which means to order, command. “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways” [Ps 91.11]. And so the multiple use of *davar* (to speak) reaches culmination in *tsavah* (to command).

Selah

Verses 14 through 25 go into considerable detail as to the genealogy of Aaron and Moses, that is, “to trace priestly lineage from Levi, Jacob’s son, to Aaron and through Aaron’s third son, Eleazar, to Phineas” (footnote in

the RSV). This process of establishing the two brothers' priestly line is important here before they present the charge (*tsavah*) to both Israel and Pharaoh. In other words, it gives them a legitimacy that was tacit instead of explicit even though at this stage we have no details as to what the notion of a priest is like for Israel. At the end of this lengthy genealogy vs. 26 continues the theme of "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts" or *tsava'*. This noun refers to an army or warfare and thus has military overtones. So before departing Egypt—when that will occur is not yet manifest—Israel is to assume a kind of military organization with Moses and Aaron as commanders.

Selah

"On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, 'I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I say to you' [vss. 28-9]. The day referred to includes the just completed dialogue which by now at the end of Chapter Six seems repetitious to the modern reader. However, it takes into account the uniqueness of divine revelation, the Lord's name as *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* which is why vs. 28 has "I am the Lord." Again, *davar* (to speak) is mentioned three times: "the Lord said to Moses," "tell Pharaoh" and "all that I said to you." Vs. 30 restates Moses' statement in vs. 12 as being of "uncircumcised lips." That is a direct lead into the next chapter which continues with the Lord showing forbearance toward Moses despite his complaint.

Chapter Seven

As noted in the Introduction, the word *selah* had been inserted after each paragraph for the first six chapters of Exodus. This pause, most likely having liturgical origins, is intended to offer a break in between paragraphs to enable the reader to go over the verse under discussion after which he or she should pause. This break is not so much a time of reflection but a suspension of reflection or mental activity in favor of resting in the Lord. From Chapter Seven onward, *selah* is not inserted. However, the reader is encouraged to continue in its spirit by pausing as long as it takes to perceive what is going on in the text.

"And the Lord said to Moses." These words continue the divine communication, a seamless continuation which bridges the last chapter by that small word *w-* prefaced, to *'amar* (said). In response to Moses' objection in 6.30 ('I am of uncircumcised lips'), the Lord says "See, I make you as God to Pharaoh; and Aaron your brother shall speak all that I command you" [vs. 1]. The Hebrew for "I make" is "I give" you, that is, give as *'elohym* to Pharaoh. Since the rulers of Egyptian were endowed with supposed divine status, Moses approaching him as *'elohym* might make him more amenable to pay attention more or less an equal. Moses' role as *'elohym* makes his brother Aaron a natural choice for the role of interpreter, a kind of prophet or *navy'*. This is the first time *navy'* is mentioned in Exodus and is not familiar to both brothers as well as the Israelites from their tradition. That means Moses and Aaron, prior to their royal audience, would have to study up on those instances where the Lord had chosen prophets. Both oral and recorded tradition were the sources for this. It turns out there is only one instance in their history, namely, Genesis, 20.7: "For he (Abraham) is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you shall live." Reference is to when King Abimelech had abducted Sarah from Abraham. So Moses and Aaron centered their attention upon this story of a king returning a lawfully wedded wife to her husband. The parallel, of course, is the current ruler, Pharaoh, who will not let Israel depart. Abimelech was open to receive the message from Abraham as prophet and complied. With that historical precedent in mind, perhaps the same might happen now. If Moses is a kind of god and Aaron is his mediator, that means Moses will have to speak first to Aaron who, in turn, will relay his words to Pharaoh. In other words, Aaron will be not unlike an interpreter.

So if Moses is an *'elohym* and Aaron the *navy'*, the Lord is the source of both. "You shall speak all that I command you" [vs. 2]. This means that while in Pharaoh's presence Moses will be paying close attention...listening...to the Lord who will be speaking. As soon as he grasps this, he will pass it on to Aaron as a faithful copy. Actually "copy" is inaccurate; better to say a replication which cannot be distinguished from the original. A time gap will be present, for it is only natural, but this perception of words coming from the Lord to Moses to Aaron will occur in a kind of nanosecond, one without perception of any break in the action. This is fulfilled in Mt 10.19-20: "When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Surely Jesus must have been mindful of the Exodus passage at hand

when uttering these words.

“But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you” (This is vs. 3 with which spills over into vs. 4). The verb for “will harden” is *qashah* which implies stubbornness. “Harden not your hearts as at Meribah” [Ps 95.8]. *Chazaq* of 4.21 (‘but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go’) differs from the *qashah* at hand in that it involves a tying fast or binding as well as making strong, and is what Pharaoh does as to his attitude. Thus Pharaoh will end up with a mind that is both bound and made stubborn, an attitude impossible to break by human means. Since Moses was already familiar with this hardening (*chazaq*), he was not surprised of its added dimension, that of being *qashah*.

Vs. 3 continues with “and though I multiply my sighs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you.” *Oth* and *mopheth* are the nouns for “signs” and “wonders.” The former was first mention in 3.10 (‘This shall be the sign for you’) and the latter in 4.21 (‘See that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power’). In the verse at hand, both *oth* and *mopheth* are to be performed not just in Pharaoh’s presence and his court but “in the land of Egypt.” That is to say, all the Egyptians (and Israelites) we see them, a collective witness to divine power.

“Pharaoh will not listen to you” [vs. 4]. That is to say, he will not listen first to Aaron and then to Moses and followed by not listening to the Lord. This was the sequence (reverse order) by which they were to communicate with Pharaoh. For the two brothers, the conclusion was more or less foregone, and they were expecting divine guidance as they were about to proceed with the signs and wonders of which they had no familiarity. Vs. 4 continues with “then I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring forth my hosts...by great acts of judgment.” This laying of the divine hand is more specifically “in” (*b-* prefaced to *Mitsrym* or Egypt) which conveys a greater sense of weightiness from which there is no escape. The “weight” consists of “great acts of judgment” or *shphatym* (plural noun). “And I will execute judgments on you, and any of you who survive I will scatter to all the winds” [Ezk 5.10]. As for the Israelites, they will escape the pressing weight of these *shphatym* even though they might be happen to be right next to a particular Egyptian. Once this weight is applied upon the Egyptians, the Israelites will simply walk away not as a people but as a hosts or *tsava’* as noted in 6.26, that is, as an army drawn up in battle order.

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch forth my hand upon Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them” [vs. 5]. Here is another example of knowing in an intimate way (*yadah*) which will be felt by that impending weight of the divine hand upon all the Egyptians. More specifically, they will intuit first this hand being stretched out (*natah*), not unlike the atmosphere you get with the approach of a storm, knowing that they will suffer the consequences. Since *yadah* is situated within the context of the Lord, during this divine *natah* they will come to realization of the Lord as *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*. “And as soon as he had stretched out his hand, they ran and entered the city and took it” [Jos 8.19]. Note that although the Lord has put Moses and Aaron in charge, it is he who will effect this. Vs. 6 anticipates divine intervention as a fait accompli: “And Moses and Aaron did so; they did as the Lord commanded them.” To heighten the significance of the miracles about to take place before Pharaoh which, in turn, will affect all Egypt, vs. 7 concludes with “Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three years old.”

“And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron” [vs. 8], that is to say, words which continue seamlessly after the previous verse. In light of Aaron being his brother’s spokesman, these words would read better as “And the Lord said to Moses and then to Aaron.” First comes the man of God followed by his spokesman and finally in this instance, Pharaoh. One can only surmise what the two brothers were thinking and sharing among each other after each divine communication. Perhaps they spent time rehearsing, if you will, with Moses transmitting to Aaron the divine words he had received earlier. Not that Moses pulled such words out of thin air but recalled past instances of divine communication and tried it out on Aaron to see if he could articulate them as clearly as possible. Then they would compare notes and see how faithful they were in their own way to the Lord’s original communication. After all, they were about to confront the most powerful ruler of the day. As for the verse at hand, the Lord says “When Pharaoh says to you ‘Prove yourselves by working a miracle,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh that it may become a

serpent.” Here the Lord anticipates Pharaoh’s response, most likely echoing Moses’ sentiments. The verb for “prove” is *natan* (the simple verb to give) with respect not so much to an *’oth* (sign) but to a *mopheth* or with something of a more spectacular nature. The demand is with respect to the two brothers (‘yourselves’) followed by Moses bidding Aaron to cast down his rod which is different from Moses’, the rod which had become a serpent. While we have a record of that event in 4.1-9, there’s nothing about the rod of Aaron. However, both rods (*mateh*) supposedly were endowed with the same power.

As typical of many instances within the Exodus text, vs. 19 continues seamlessly from the previous verses with no indication of an intervening time gap: “So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord commanded.” True to what the Lord had said, Aaron’s rod “became a serpent (*tanym*).” Moses’ rod had become a *nachash*, the same term applied to the serpent in the garden of Eden whereas Aaron’s rod is a *tanym*, a term associated with a great sea monster. “You did break the heads of the dragons on the waters” [Ps 74.13]. No small wonder that at the sight of such a huge, whale-like beast Pharaoh immediately “summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts” [vs. 11]. Three types of courtiers are mentioned here: 1) wise men (*chakam*; adjective) or those endowed with the ability to judge, 2) sorcerers (*kashaph*; verb used as participle) or those, according to this verb, who employ enchantments and incantations. “You shall not permit a sorceress to live” [22.18]. Finally 3) magicians (*chartom*, only in the plural) or those who originally were scribes as indicated by the verbal root *charat*, to engrave. This term has echoes in another Pharaoh, the one associated with Joseph: “So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt” [Gen 41.8]. All three—wise men, sorcerers and magicians—were expert in “secret arts” or *lehatym*, the only use of this term in the Bible whose verbal root *lahat* primarily meaning to burn or kindle and secondarily, to hide. They too had rods which turned into serpents, *tanym* or huge whale-like beasts, instead of the *nachash* of Moses’ rod. The sudden sight of so many huge creatures suddenly appearing in Pharaoh’s court must have filled everyone with awe and fear. Finally “Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods” [vs. 12]. *Mateh* is used here, not *tanym*, which means the alteration from rod to *tanym* must have last briefly before these beasts had caused havoc. Despite this, “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened,” *chazaq* as in 4.21, and as predicted by the Lord. On the way out of the royal court, Moses must have asked Aaron why his rod became a *tanym* instead of the more modest *nachash*. That was, of course, to impress Pharaoh and his courtiers whereas Moses’ rod was to have greater symbolism later when he raised it on a pole to cure people bitten by snakes (cf. Num 21.9). Also a *nachash* would be more in tune with the serpent who had tempted Eve.

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Pharaoh’s heart is hardened, he refuses to let the people go’” [vs. 14]. This may seem obvious, but the word for “hardened” is not *chazaq* but *kavad* which more specifically means to be heavy. “Harden (i.e., do not make heavy) your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh” [1Sam 6.6]. *Kavad* is used a number of times in Exodus which means that in addition to Pharaoh’s heart being *chazaq* or bound, it is weighed down by his own volition. Both would prove, as Moses and Aaron would discover shortly, to be an almost unsurmountable obstacle. Despite this, the Lord continues in vs. 15, “Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he is going out to the water.” That would involve considerable courage, to be sure, to confront Pharaoh the very next day. However, it would take place outside by the Nile River when he is more approachable. Moses is to take in his hand “the rod which was turned into a serpent” perhaps to intimidate Pharaoh, thinking that the rod would change again into a *nachash*, one that would slither into the water while he was taking a bath.

Vs. 16 continues with the familiar theme of the Lord wanting Pharaoh to let his people worship in the wilderness but adds “but you have not yet obeyed” or listened, *shamah* being the verb for “obeyed.” Obviously Pharaoh’s inability to listen was hampered by his two-fold hardening of his heart, *chazaq* and *kavad*. It is to the Lord’s credit, not Moses, that he repeats himself and will continue to do so in order to lift this double hardening. Also it provides the Lord with practice, if you will, for Israel’s similar behavior later in the desert and in the land of Canaan.

“By this you will know that I am the Lord: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the rod that is my hand, and it shall be turned to blood” [vs. 17]. Another example of knowledge (*yadah*) in terms of intimate familiarity which, unfortunately for Pharaoh does not come about. These words as well as the previous ones were spoken by the Lord to Moses who, as had been pointed out, had to relay them to Aaron and then on to

Pharaoh. Perhaps Aaron's role as "translator" made Pharaoh suspicious, a reason why this drama is extending longer than would be expected. Pharaoh could just stand there and mock them both, thinking them to be some kind of fanatical religious side-show. Then Moses strikes the Nile three times after which "the Nile shall become foul" [vs. 18]. The verb is *ba'ash* as used in 5.21 with a different sense: "The Lord look upon you and judge because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants." In other words, the foremen of the Israelites had become a foul smell. While present with Pharaoh on the banks of the Nile River, Moses not only through Aaron made its waters *ba'ash* but "their rivers, their canals, and their ponds and all their pools of water, that they may become blood" [vs. 19]. Thus the rod of Aaron which had changed into a *tanyim* or something like a large whale is the agent. Though Aaron strike the Nile, this striking simultaneously extended to all the fresh water sources within Egypt.

"But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts" [vs. 22]. These magicians must have accompanied Pharaoh to his bath in the Nile, forming part of his extended retinue. Thus there were on hand to counter the gesture made by Aaron, something the Lord had foreseen as in the previous case. Frustrated at not being able to bathe, Pharaoh turned around and went home "and he did not lay even this to heart" [vs. 23]. That is to say, Pharaoh could not put this stunning event "to" (*L*) his heart because it had become both *chazaq* and *kavad*, bound and weighed down. He could have changed the situation around on the spot but chose not to do so. Hence "all the Egyptians dug round about the Nile for water to drink" [vs. 24]. This lasted for seven full days. NB: vs. 24 concludes the RSV translation whereas the Hebrew continues through vs. 29. Here the Hebrew version is followed.

Vs. 26 has the Lord bidding Moses "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord, "Let my people go that they may serve me."' As noted in the previous verse, this happened seven days after Aaron had changed all the water in Egypt into blood. Nothing is said about when things returned to normal, certainly less than seven days in this desert country if people and animals were to survive. The penalty this time? "Behold, I will plague all your country with frogs" [vs. 27]. *Nagaph* is the verb for "plague," the first time it is used despite the first incident of water turning into blood and means to smite, strike against. "Behold, I will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives and all your possessions" [2Chron 21.14].

As for "frogs," the noun is *tsphardeh*; apart from Chapter Eight, there are two biblical references, one of which is Ps 78.45 which refers to the plague at hand: "He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them and frogs which destroyed them." Note that these frogs will be more specifically at Egypt's borders, *geval* being used. While that applies to the physical limits of Egypt, it implies that these frogs will take up their position there, all about, and swarm over the land from which there will be no escape. A clear indication of this invasion is given in vs. 28: "The Nile shall swarm with frogs." The verb is *sharats* already noted in 1.7: "But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly." There the verb refers to multiplication; the verse at hand implies this but conveys an additional sense of invasion. While vs. 28 says that these frogs will infiltrate everywhere, the worst part is when they go "into the house of your servants and of your people" or better, "in (*b-*) you people." That is to say, these frogs will become so thick they will "enter into" every Egyptian but leave the Israelites alone. As for the Israelites, they will be immediate witness to divine power which hopefully will convince them to listen to Moses and Aaron. To intensify the sense this invasion, the frogs "shall come upon you and on your people and on all your servants" [vs. 29]. Just as with vs. 29 here the preposition *b-* is prefaced to "people" and "servants." The verb *halah* ('shall come upon') suggests leaping upon and then in (*b-*) which makes the situation unbearable.

Chapter Eight

The RSV begins with 8.5. The notes for Chapter Eight follow in accord.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Stretch out your hand with your rod (etc.)'" [vs. 1]. Because vss.1-3 repeat more or less what had been said towards the conclusion of the last chapter, they will be passed by. However, vs.1 starts off with the sequence—a hierarchy in the literal sense of "order of holiness"—with Moses first speaking to Moses who, in turn, speaks to Aaron and thus imparts to him the order. It is of vital importance for Moses to grasp right what the Lord says so he can repeat it; just as important is the ability of

Aaron to listen attentively.

“Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said ‘Entreat the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people’ [vs. 8]. This second plague took place seven days “after the Lord had struck the Nile” [7.25] by changing it and all water throughout Egypt into blood. Chances are that apart from the Nile water supplies were scarce as in the form of oases. The verb for “entreat” is *hatar*, fundamentally meaning to offer incense to a god, to supplicate. “And Isaac entreated the Lord” [Gen 25.21]. Though quite frightful, the swarm of frogs isn’t as life-threatening as the water having been turned into blood. Then Pharaoh’s heart became hardened but not here. After all, his magicians did the same as well as the blood-into-water incident. What frightens Pharaoh is the all-pervasive swarming of frogs from which there is no escape. That’s why he practically begs Moses to take away (*sur*) these swarms after which he let the people “go to sacrifice in the wilderness.” *Sur* is an apt verb here, taken as desperate wish to swat away the frogs and is used with the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to “me” and “people.”

“Be pleased to command me when I am to entreat for you and for your servants and for your people” [vs. 9]. Once can imagine Moses speaking to Pharaoh and his retinue as they desperately tried to brush away these frogs while Moses and Aaron remained unaffected. “Be pleased to command.” The second verb is lacking in the Hebrew text with *pa’ar* which also means to adorn, dig or bore. “The glory of Lebanon shall come to you...to beautify the place of my sanctuary” [Is 60.13]. *Pa’ar* is used with the preposition *hal* (on) prefaced to “me”...a pleasing upon me (i.e., Moses). In other words, this is a compliance in return for Pharaoh’s apparent agreement (later to be retracted) to set Israel free. “Tomorrow” ‘Moses said, “Be it as you say, that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God”” [vs. 10]. Moses gave Pharaoh a full day to reflect on knowing (*yadah* again as intimate, familiar knowledge) with regard to the Lord which means he had to put up with the swarms of frogs the rest of the day and overnight.

Moses stuck to his side of the bargain and “cried out to the Lord concerning the frogs as he had agreed with Pharaoh” [vs. 12]. This reads literally as “on the matter (*davar*: word) of the frogs which he had placed upon Pharaoh.” In other words, this plague seemed directed right at Pharaoh, and a nasty one at that. In accord with the bargain, the frogs “died out of the houses and out of the courtyards and out of the fields” [vs. 13]. Use of the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to all three locations is indicative of their complete removal. “And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank” [vs. 14]. The verb *tsavar* (to heap into mounds) is an apt word to describe the disgusting aftermath. “And lay up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities” [Gen 41.35]. As for the land stinking, it was especially bad under the desert sun. “But when Pharaoh saw that a respite had come, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them as the Lord had said” [vs. 11]. *Rewachah* is the noun for “respite” derived from the same verbal root as *ruach* (wind, spirit). Two other references exist, Lam 3.56 and Ps 66.12, the latter being quoted here: “We went through fire and through water, yet you have brought us forth to a spacious place.” And so *rewachah* is temporal and spacial; Pharaoh instead of using it profitably, hardened his heart, the verb being *kavad* or weighed down as in 7.14. Because such a weight is so grievous, it prevented him from listening to both Moses and Aaron. Actually it’s more accurate to say Aaron and Moses, Aaron being the mediator who passed on this *kavad* of Pharaoh to Moses.

Without a pause the text continues with “Then (in other words, that small but important connective *w-*) the Lord said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron, “Stretch out your rod and strike the dust of the earth that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt”” [vs. 16]. Again, an interplay of two words, “stretch out” and “strike” or *natah* and *nakah*. Aaron couldn’t do the latter alone but needed to make a gesture for all to see what he was doing, that is, he had to *natah* his rod first. *kinam* is the word for “gnat,” this along with the next verse being the only two instances in the Bible. It is significant that Aaron struck the dust to produce these gnats, for “all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout the land of Egypt” [vs. 17]. Pharaoh’s magicians attempted to do the same but to no avail [cf. vs. 18]. No reason is given except that it was beyond their power. Their response? “This is the finger of God” [vs. 19]. You’d think Pharaoh would be impressed but was not, so his heart was hardened, the verb now being *chazaq* or bound as in 7.22.

Next (*w-* again) comes the fourth plague, right on the heels of the third. “Rise up early in the morning and

wait for Pharaoh as he goes out to the water” [vs. 20]. This is the second instance of Pharaoh going (presumably) to the Nile for a bath, the first being in 7.15. The time isn’t given in this first reference, so it’s before noon compared with *shakam* (to rise early). Perhaps Pharaoh took a bath several times in the course of the day, this being the first one. It’s a new strategy on the Lord’s part, thinking that at such an early hour Pharaoh might be better disposed before the cares of the day rushed upon him. It is to the credit of Moses and Aaron to follow the Lord’s bidding once again; the same applies to Pharaoh who could have slain them on the spot. The difference with this encounter is that the two brothers were to “wait” or *natsav* for Pharaoh, this verb suggestive of deliberate placing. That is to say, Moses and Aaron are to put or situate themselves in a place where Pharaoh couldn’t miss seeing them. The familiar request of letting Israel go was presented or else “I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people and into your houses” [vs. 21]. “And you shall stand upon a rock” [33.21]. *Harov* is the word for “swarms of flies” and differs from the *sharats* of frogs of the second plague. “He sent among them swarms of flies which devoured them and frogs which destroyed them” [Ps 78.45]. These flies are to be on “the ground on which they stand” meaning they will be so thick as to form a carpet, worse than frogs by reason of their smallness.

“But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen where my people dwell so that no swarms of flies shall be there” [vs. 22]. During the earlier plagues there was no necessity to *palah* or set aside Israel, this verb suggesting a distinction between it and the Egyptians. “But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself” [Ps 4.3]. Due to the near microscopic size of these gnats the Israelites had to remove themselves from the Egyptians. It was one thing to be among them with the frogs, but their size and almost infinite number makes this a necessity. As for Goshen, that was the part of Egypt near the mouth of the Nile and thus the closest part of Egypt to Canaan from which the Israel (Jacob) and his brothers had come over four hundred years ago (cf. Gen 47.4). The Lord says that already he had set apart this region; despite the picture that the Israelites has spread throughout the land, clustering about the Nile River as most of the Egyptians, they preferred Goshen. Their scattering came about chiefly by reason of being pressed into hard labor. Also being in Goshen provided a staging area in preparation to leave, the ultimaterreason behind this plague. Vs. 22 concludes with “that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth.” Here is another invitation to Pharaoh to *yadah* or to know not so much the Lord but his dominion *qerev* the earth, *qerev* or in the midst or very center of the earth, not just Egypt.

“Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. By tomorrow shall this sign be” [vs. 23]. *Peduth* is the noun for “division” and implies the making of a distinction. It has three other biblical references, one of which is Ps 111.9 with a meaning not unlike the verse at hand: “He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever.” The land of Goshen just noted is the staging area, if you will, for this *peduth*. It is equated with a “sign” or *oth* last mentioned in 7.3: “But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” Vs. 24 continues from this statement into the day after or “tomorrow:” “And the Lord did so” (that is, without any interruption or temporal gap so often noted by the conjunction *w-* prefaced to the first word of vs. 24. “And in all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by reason of the flies” [vs. 24]. *Shachath* is the verb for “ruined” and also means to act wickedly. “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence” [Gen 6.11].

“Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, ‘Go sacrifice to your God within the land’” [vs. 25]. Here is an example of what now has become a familiar refrain but only this time it is to be “within the land” or the *‘erets* of Egypt, not in the wilderness where the Israelites could make good their escape. Perhaps Pharaoh had in mind the more specific *‘erets* of Goshen. This restriction prompted Moses to reply “It would not be right to do so; for we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God offerings abominable to the Egyptians” [vs. 26]. Surely a difficult thing to say by a leader but one that might sway Pharaoh. *Kun* is the word for “right” which connotes the idea of being established and hence is applicable to a custom. “And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God” [Gen 41.32]. Although the theme of Israel making sacrifice is a constant refrain in Exodus, there’s no real precedent for it in the same book. It infers access to tradition originating back in Canaan over four hundred years ago. We can assume that the Israelites had not made sacrifice since that time or since their arrival in Egypt which also practice sacrifice, and what that involved remains unrecorded. As for Moses taking the initiative in saying that the nature of Israel’s sacrifice would be abominable to the Egyptians or *tohevah* (noun), it is reminiscent of Gen 43.32: “They served him (Joseph) by

himself and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination.” This fear of mingling two types of sacrifices is just as powerful a force as the plagues, even more so, for if it did happen, “will they (the Egyptians) not stone us?”

“We must go three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God” [vs. 27]. As in 3.18 and 5.3, *derek* is the word for “journey,” a common term applicable to a road or way. With Goshen having been specified in vs. 18 as the place where the Israelites were to move, that makes them all the more closer to Canaan with a relatively small area of wilderness to traverse. In fact, it is along a major road connecting Africa with Asia. As noted in the paragraph above, the nature of this sacrifice is unclear to the Israelites themselves which is why vs. 27 adds “as he will command us,” the simple verb *amar* (to say, to speak) being used. Threat of this unknown type of sacrifice only cast Pharaoh into more fear and doubt as to Moses’ intentions. Perhaps their sacrifice will be offered as a means to set the Lord against Egypt and will have an effect more devastating than the plagues, for Egypt just came off four plagues with the possibility of more to come. This time Pharaoh relents “only you shall not go very far away” [vs. 28]. He adds “Make entreaty for me” or *hatar* as used in vs. 8 and as noted there, implies the offering of incense and to supplicate: “Entreat the Lord to take away the frogs from me and from my people.” Such a request was indeed striking to Moses and Aaron, an indication that Pharaoh was weakening in his resolve through this process of inflicting plagues and bargaining.

“Then Moses said, ‘Behold, I am going out from you and I will pray to the Lord that the swarms of flies may depart from Pharaoh...tomorrow” [vs. 29]. These words of self-dismissal, unusual for a subject or even worse, a representative from a semi-servile group of people, reveal greater confidence that the tide has turned in Israel’s favor coupled as it is with Pharaoh’s request for *hatar* in the last paragraph. *Hineh* or “behold” emphasizes this, something like “Now pay attention to me!” The verb for “will pray” is *hatar*, more specific to the plague of flies. Moses is careful to add “tomorrow” as when this *hatar* will take effect, stringing out Pharaoh, as it were, to make sure he keeps his side of the bargain. Then he adds in vs. 29, “only let not Pharaoh deal falsely again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” *Talal* is the verb for “deal falsely” which alternately means to mock. “Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me” [Gen 31.7]. To show that Moses means business this verb has the added one of *yasaph* (to add, increase): in other words, Pharaoh is not to increase his deception, a tendency to which he had restored several times earlier (and will do so again). The small word *raq* (again) is an indication of Moses’ new-found confidence and adds to the sense of the drama at hand.

“So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord” [vs. 30]. This going out is significant, for Moses could not pray in the presence of a ruler who considered himself divine; the same applies to the Egyptians. Thus he had to “pray in secret,” to borrow the words of Mt 6.6...even without Aaron being present. When the next verse (31) says that “not one (fly) remained,” quite a feat for the Lord to accomplish given the near microscopic size of these insects which have been described in terms of swarms. “But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also and did not let the people go” [vs. 32]. By now these words are a familiar refrain and have the advantage, if you will, of Moses getting experience both with Pharaoh and more importantly, the Lord. Here the word for “hardened” is *kavad* or when Pharaoh weighed down his heart voluntarily as last noted in vs. 11. Although this sentence begins with *w-* (and, but) as with so many in the Book of Exodus, the action continues seamlessly into the next chapter. It gives the impression that this particular section (the ten plagues) came in rapid succession followed by the familiar hardening of Pharaoh’s heart and Moses’ strategy of dealing with such an obstinate ruler. This is apart from occasional mention of “tomorrow,” etc. Then again, Pharaoh must be credited with tolerance of Moses and Aaron, a fact noted above. With one simple gesture he could order the immediate execution of the brothers followed by the extermination of the Israelites. However, his mind was set on retaining the Israelites as forced laborers.

Chapter Nine

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, “Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, ‘Let my people go that they may serve me.’”’” This verse begins with the familiar *w-* prefaced to the first word *amar* or “said” and reveals continuous action, important to note at the beginning of a new chapter. At this

juncture such a request seems repetitive, even wearisome, but it lies at the very heart of the ongoing drama being played out. At the same time Moses was becoming quite adept at dealing with Pharaoh...and visa versa. "Serve" or *havad* was noted in 7.26 and is the exact opposite of that *havad* imposed by the Egyptians in 1.17. This request to *havad* the Lord touched a sensitive nerve in Pharaoh, for it was he who imposed his own brand of *havad*. Now the Lord presents a threat in vs. 2: "For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them" (this sentence carries over into vs. 3). *Chazaq* is the verb to "hold," the same as applicable to Pharaoh's heart being held fast or bound. The Lord was aware of this which is why he offers the threat using the same term.

"Behold, the hand of the Lord will fall with a very severe plague upon your cattle" [vs.3]. In addition to cattle are horses, asses, camels, herds and flocks...in other words, all the livestock of Egypt. Note that cattle are first mentioned which originally were put in charge of Jacob and his brothers (cf. Gen 47.6). To make matters worse, the Lord continues to speak through Moses, "But the Lord will make a distinction between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the people of Israel" [vs. 4]. Only the cattle are singled out for this distinction, *palah* intimating a severing as in 33.16: "Is it not in your gong with us so that we are distinct, I am your people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?" Such a calamity has the potential of being averted, but it is up to the Lord to decide. "And the Lord set a time, saying, "Tomorrow the Lord will do this in the land" [vs. 5]. *Mohed* is the noun for "time" which also can apply to an assembly. "The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the appointed feasts" [Is 1.4]. Thus *mohed* seems to have some characteristics of the Greek *kairos* meaning a special occasion when the Lord intervenes in history. Though the subsequent verses do not mention it, easily one can visualize both Egyptians and Israelites assembling together, even intermingling, in order to see what the Lord will effect. The exact time isn't specified, just that "on the morrow the Lord did this thing" [vs. 6], *davar* being the word "for thing" which is the verbal root "to speak." In other words, the *mohed* is a thing spoken. Once the cattle of the Egyptians died, "Pharaoh sent and behold, not one of the cattle of the Israelites was dead" [vs. 7]. This sending (*shalach*) isn't spelled out; it could have been for Moses and Aaron or even his magicians who wouldn't dare replicate this tragedy. Thus this incident precipitates the familiar response, "But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go" [vs. 7]. *Kavad* is the word for hardened noted above several times meaning that his heart became weighed down. As far as *shalach* is concerned, it is used here with "did (not) let go."

Without missing a beat between this plague and the next (*w-* as that familiar connective), the Lord bade Moses and Aaron: "Take handfuls of ashes from the kiln, and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh" [vs. 8]. This means the two brothers were back in Pharaoh's presence despite his heart having been hardened at the plague of the cattle and other animals. There must have been plenty of kilns in the vicinity used for making bricks (cf. 5.7-8), and surely Pharaoh was aware of this gesture. "And it shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt and becomes boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt" [vs. 9]. Ash is relatively fine and more easily dispersed and quickly traveled throughout Egypt. *Shichym* is the word for "boils," a kind of inflamed ulcer. "So Satan...afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" [Job 2.7]. *Avahbuhoth* (feminine plural) is the noun for "sores," the only use in the Bible. As bad as this plague was, what made it worse in Pharaoh's sight is that the "boils were upon the magicians" as well" [vs. 11], for they were in the presence of Moses. And so this plague ends with Pharaoh yet again hardening his heart, the verb not being *kavad* but *chazaq* as in 8.19 or "held." This time vs. 12 adds "as the Lord had spoken to Moses" in order to reassure him to persevere.

"Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him" [vs. 13]. Truly this takes courage and as noted earlier, reveals the tolerance Pharaoh had toward Moses who could have slain him on the spot. Pharaoh's tolerance is especially noteworthy at this early hour, for such an unpleasant encounter easily could have put in a bad mood for the rest of the day. Chances are that a tacit agreement had been reached between the two adversaries though never did either man make mention of it. The other time the Lord bade Moses to rise early was when Pharaoh was going to the Nile for a bath; perhaps the same is to happen again, but it is not specified. After being told to let the Israelites go, this time the Lord is even tougher: "For this time I will send all my plagues upon your heart and upon your servants and your people" [vs. 14]. *Natsav* was used in 7.15 when Moses met Pharaoh by the river and as noted in that context, implies the taking up of a position, not just standing around. This *natsav* is deliberate and reveals Moses' seriousness. He needs it, of course, for today could be the last day of his life. As for the word "time," it's *paham* which means a strike as by an anvil

and thus conveys suddenness and a hint of finality. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman” [Gen 2.23]. Note the direction of these plagues...not upon Egypt but “upon your heart” or in Hebrew to or toward (*’el-*) your heart or *lev*, the center of Pharaoh’s being. The Lord doesn’t say how many plagues are left; given what had transpired thus far, it was bound to be rather nasty. Though vs. 14 mentions “your servants and your people,” the plagues don’t hit home that intimately. Still, the purpose of this harsh punishment is not to take retribution upon Pharaoh but “that you may know (*yadah*) that there is none like me in all the earth.”

“For by now I could have put forth my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth” [vs. 15]. The Lord had promised this already in 3.20: So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it.” The verb in both instances is the stronger gesture of *shalach* (to send) compared with the more casual though dramatic stretching (*natah*) of Aaron in 8.5: “Stretch out your hand with your rod over the rivers.” *Dever* is the noun for “pestilence;” from the familiar verbal root *davar* (to speak) and connotes that the pestilence at hand is something divinely uttered. “He did not spare them from death but gave their lives over to the plague” [Ps 78.50]. Vs. 15 ends with the verb *kachad* (‘cut off’) which means to deny, disown or cover, the last verb seeming to be what it means essentially. “And there is nothing hidden from the king” [2Sam 18.13].

“But for this purpose I let you live, to show you my power so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” [vs. 16]. The verb for “live” is *hamad* which means to stand or to take one’s stand and thus suggests a continuance of Pharaoh’s existence so that future wonders may be manifest through him. “You have set my feet in a broad place” [Ps 31.8]. Once the Lord has shown Pharaoh his divine power (*koach*: also means splendor), Pharaoh in turn will make known this same *koach*, having become an intermediary not unlike Moses. Actually Pharaoh could surpass Moses in fame by spreading news of the Lord not just throughout Egypt but “all the earth.” *Saphar* is the verb for “declared” and fundamentally means to inscribe or write down. “Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving and telling all your wondrous deeds” [Ps 26.7]. Thus Pharaoh could declare the Lord rather easily without leaving his throne. That is to say, he could issue decrees or *saphar* them after which copies would be made and circulated quickly throughout his domain.

As for the refusal not to listen to the Lord through Moses, “You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go” [vs. 18]. *Salal* is the verb for “exalting” and also can mean a wavering or moving back and forth. “Cast up a highway for him who rides through the desert” [Ps 68.4]. This verb uses the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to “my people” thus rendering it “exalting in my people” almost in the sense of bullying and taunting them. No small wonder that if true, Pharaoh doesn’t want to let the Israelites leave Egypt. This fairly extended communication through Moses by the Lord to Pharaoh is followed by the threat of another plague: “Behold, tomorrow about this time I will cause very heavy hail to fall” [vs. 18]. “About this time” is that “early in the morning” [vs. 13] when the Lord bade Moses to rise and meet Pharaoh. That means the hail will catch many people unawares before they had arisen. “He destroyed their vines with hail and their sycamores with frost” [Ps 78.47]. As to the founding of Egypt (‘never has been in Egypt from the day it was founded’), this intimates its supposed divine establishment as was the case with most ancient empires. *Yasad* is a verb used for this term and fundamentally means to take counsel as in Ps 31.13: “as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.” As for the affliction at hand, its special character is that it comes straight down upon everyone and everything except the land of Goshen, home of the Israelites (cf. vs. 26).

Due to the severity of the impending hail, the Lord himself offers some provision: “Get your cattle and all that you have in the field into safe shelter” [vs. 19]. Given the desert climate of Egypt, there may have not been many shelters with roofs strong enough to withstand the hail, so many people used the divine warning as an opportunity to erect such protection, albeit temporary. Interestingly we have in the next verse (20) members of Pharaoh’s household apparently sympathetic toward the Israelites. While this hadn’t been commented upon until now, certainly some became well-disposed over the four hundred year presence of Israel within Egypt. Such Egyptians “feared the word of the Lord,” *yare’* meaning to have respect towards the *davar* of the Lord. Being in Pharaoh’s household, such people were eyewitnesses to the encounters between Pharaoh and Moses, so they had plenty of opportunity to grasp what this divine *davar* was about. Of course, they had to maintain silence before Pharaoh and his other courtiers. Most likely some accompanied Israel during the Exodus

whereas others remained behind whose descendants later welcomed Mary, Joseph and Jesus (cf. Mt 2.13) where they fled Herod's wrath. Just as these royal householders feared the divine *davar*, so there were others—the number isn't given but presumably was much larger though the singular "he" is used—who did "not regard the word of the Lord" but "left his slaves and his cattle in the field" [vs. 21]. The verb for "regard" is *sum* (to put, place) to (*el*) as connected to *davar* meaning "did not place his heart to the word of the Lord. Though *hazav* means "left" with respect to slaves and cattle in the unprotected fields, it suggests strongly the idea of abandoning them to certain death.

"Stretch forth your hand toward heaven that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt" [vs. 22], another example of *natah* (to stretch) as noted above with regard to 8.5. Moses complied, and "the Lord sent thunder and hail and fire ran down to the earth" [vs. 23]. The fire most likely means lightning which added to the terror, and this fire was "flashing continuously in the midst of the hail, very heavy hail, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation" [vs. 24]. The adverb "continually" is a verb form in Hebrew from the verbal root *laqach* meaning to take hold of, seize and in the context suggests lightning mingling with the hail. A similar image is presented in Ezk 1.4 with regard to Ezekiel's vision of the throne chariot: "As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north and a great cloud with brightness round about it and fire flashing forth continually." This plague ends with the comment, "Only in the land of Goshen where the people of Israel were there was no hail" [vs. 26]. To those in Goshen, this hail must have appeared as a wall of fire and white (hailstones) all around them, pretty much like a curtain which must have wiped out a substantial part of the Egyptian population.

Pharaoh easily escaped this plague because his palace was made of sturdy quarried rock. Apart from this and other official establishments, it seems little had survived the onslaught. So once the hail, thunder and lightning ceased, he summoned Moses and Aaron. "I have sinned this time; the Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong" [vs. 27]. Here is yet a second example that despite Pharaoh's heart having been hardened, he had some glimmer of hope. *Chatah* is the word for "sinned" and originally applied to an archer missing his mark. Actually this is the first mention of *chatah* in Exodus, all the more remarkable that it came from the most powerful man in the known world. Then again, it could be argued that after the plague of hail, he was desperate and would admit to anything provided that it was politically expedient. "Right" is the adjective *tsadyq* which connotes being just and "wrong" is *rashah* which connotes the opposite, even evil. Pharaoh then asks Moses "Entreat the Lord; for there has been enough of this thunder and hail" [vs. 28]. *Hatar* is the verb for "entreat" as noted in a similar circumstance, 8.28: "Make entreaty for me." By now Moses was familiar with this give-and-take but had to comply just in case Pharaoh really meant what he said. He offers this *hatar* on Pharaoh's behalf not in his presence, in the shelter of the palace, but in the open air outside the city or what was left of it. "The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is the Lord's" [vs. 29]. So Moses engages in *hatar* while the plague was raging on; he was unaffected like the Israelites in Goshen, making his way through the maelstrom much as he would later while crossing the Red Sea. Since Pharaoh had acknowledged his sin, perhaps now he might recognize or know (*yadah* as intimate knowledge) that the Lord was in charge, and that the earth was his.

Despite the positive attitude by Pharaoh, Moses wryly adds "But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the Lord God" [vs. 30]. In other words, Moses has a *yadah* of Pharaoh's insincerity. At the same time, what world leader would sit there tolerating such words from an obscure man as Moses? It's remarkable, really, and is a quality of the man that often goes unrecognized. While blasting Egypt with thunder, lightning and ruinous hail, the Lord didn't want to destroy the land which is why vs. 31 and 32 say that although flax and barley were ruined, the wheat and spelt were not due to the latter two being late in budding.

Once Pharaoh saw that this seventh plague had ceased at Moses' *hatar* or entreaty, he returned to his old attitude: "he sinned yet again and hardened his heart, he and his servants" [vs. 34]. Here the familiar *kavad* or weighing-down of Pharaoh's heart is joined with *chatah*, to sin. Previous instances of his heart being *kavad* as well as *chazaq* (bound up tightly) did not mention *chatah*; this is the first time we have it intimating that despite the succession of misfortunes, Pharaoh was unrepentant. *Chatah* thus serves to heighten the tension for the remaining three plagues, especially the tenth which pushes him over the edge. As for the completion of

this, Chapter Nine, the text adds the verb *chazaq*: “So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go as the Lord has spoken through Moses” [vs. 35]. The word “as” or *ka’asher* (*k-* or ‘as’ more specifically prefaced to *’asher*, relative pronoun) is important in that it reveals that Pharaoh was acting in accord with a larger plan, one even he did not comprehend.

Chapter Ten

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants that I may show these signs of mine among them.’” Such are the now almost wearisome words of the Lord to Moses and Aaron concerning the seventh plague. Also we have the familiar *w-* (and) prefaced to the verb *’amar* (‘said’) indicating continuous action and connection with what had just transpired, the plague of hail. By now Moses must have grown skeptical about the effectiveness of his confrontations though he doesn’t reveal it, a subject of much private conversation with his brother Aaron. At the same time the Israelites were aware of all that had been transpiring...who could not help but notice all these plagues? While they were unaffected, many were getting worried about how the Egyptians would treat them after so much devastation. For Moses to speak with Pharaoh he must have required permission; it is no small wonder that Pharaoh granted another audience after he “hardened his heart” [9.34]. As noted several times earlier, Pharaoh easily could have turned down the request, but after so many afflictions it was better to keep in dialogue with a man whose God was responsible for them. And so the cat-and-mouse game continues. Vs. 9.34 just quoted says that Pharaoh had hardened (*kavad*) his heart, that it came from his own volition. Now 10.1 says that the Lord has effected it. So if Pharaoh voluntarily had done it, a hardening from the Lord was a double whammy. In a sense this offered some protection from Moses against any retribution; Pharaoh was too preoccupied with his own inner turmoil. This time Moses is to show signs (*’oth*; last noted in 8.23) among the Egyptians. The verb for “to show” is *shyth* last mentioned (but not noted) in 7.23 and means a putting or setting which certainly can be visible for all to behold. “Who has put wisdom in the clouds or given understanding to the mists” [Job 38.36]? This seeing...placing...takes place *betok* the Egyptians or right in the center of the population so they could not be missed.

“That you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your son’s son how I have made sport of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them; that you may know that I am the Lord” [vs. 2]. There’s a touch of irony in these words—“your son and your son’s son”—because the tenth and final plague is the death of all first born both of humans and of animals. Chances are that Pharaoh had other sons, so death of the first born would be pressed indelibly upon their minds. The word for “hearing” is the common noun “ear.” Passing on an account to future generations that the Lord, not part of the Egyptian pantheon, would do such a thing is unthinkable, especially when it comes to making sport of the people. The verb is *halal* which has several meanings such as to drink, glean, accomplish, expand. As for the use here, see 1Sam 6.6: “After he had made sport of them, did not they let the people go, and the departed?” Vs. 2 has a second occurrence of *’oth* (sign) which is “among them” (*b-* or in) with the verb *sum* (‘placed’); compare with vs. 1, *betok* (‘among them’ or in their midst). As with earlier instances, the reason for such signs is for the good of the Egyptians, to *yadah* or have intimate knowledge of the Lord.

“How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go that they may serve me.” These words of vs. 3 are preceded by saying that Moses and Aaron did as the Lord had commanded by going to Pharaoh and by claiming that the Lord, not they, was responsible for issuing this injunction. The Lord is identified as being “of the Hebrews” last noted in 9.13. By now Moses as the one who had received the command and Aaron who actually communicated it to Pharaoh were quite adept at this two-fold process. That means they didn’t have to rehearse for their audience with Pharaoh nor did Pharaoh have to figure out what was going on before him since he had witnessed it before. At issue was not so much the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart but his refusal to humble himself, the verb being *hanah*. As with *halal* in the last paragraph, *hanah* has multiple meanings: to sing, answer and to be afflicted. One reference with an alternate though parallel meaning is Is 53.7: “He was oppressed and was afflicted.” Since Pharaoh’s heart had been hardened so many times, it was impossible for him to comply to the Lord’s wish, this despite having acknowledged Moses to entreat the Lord for him and that he had sinned (8.28 & 9.27).

“For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country” [vs. 4]. Insertion of *hineh* or “behold” is important as in earlier occasions, for it is a way of getting Pharaoh’s undivided attention...almost as an attempt to cut through hardened heart of his. *‘Arbeh* is the noun for “locust” as in Ps 105.34: “He spoke, and the locusts came.” Such locusts do not appear in Egypt all at once; the word for “country” is *gevul* or the borders of Egypt as in 8.2. As with the frogs in that plague, the locusts are to take up their position just outside the borders of Egypt and make their way inward from all four cardinal points. It’s a very threatening image, to be sure, meaning it will be impossible for the Egyptians to escape as they press little by little into an every shrinking circle. The next verse (5) describes this onslaught aptly: “and they shall cover the face of the land (*‘erets* being used, not *gevul* or borders).” *Heyn* is the word for “face” which more accurately translates as “eye.” This image of the *heyneyn* being at the very center of Egypt gives more weight to the image of locusts streaming in from all four borders of the country and converging there. The locusts will be so thick or dense that “no one can see the land.” Furthermore, they will devour whatever had been left over from the previous plague, that of hail which crushed everything unprotected. That’s pretty terrifying, but what’s worse is that the locusts will enter “the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians” [vs. 6].

“And Pharaoh’s servants said to him, ‘How long shall this man be a snare to us? Let the men go that they may serve the Lord their God’” [vs. 7]. It was no small matter for these subordinates to speak so boldly to their master; under ordinary circumstances Pharaoh may have ran them through on the spot, but the situation was getting desperate. One can imagine this dialogue transpiring with the audience hall chock full of buzzing locusts; it was close to impossible for them to speak. *Moqesh* is the noun for “snare,” a means...most likely something like a net...by which wild beasts and birds were caught. “The cords of Sheol encompassed me, the torrents of perdition assailed me” [Ps 18.5]. While Pharaoh may have hardened his heart not just now but earlier as the servants had witnessed, it was enough. They bade him to let Moses lead the Israelites from Egypt and get rid of them once and for all. They were quite correct, for by this time Egypt was reduced to ruin, a terribly weakened condition that might invite invaders. The second question put to Pharaoh in vs. 7 is even more to the point: “Do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” *‘Avad* is the word for “ruined,” a noun connoting being lost and wandering about. “For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish” [Is 29.14]. If we keep in mind the sense of being lost with *‘avad*, it can be said that by reason of having hardened his heart, Pharaoh already had been lost. It was a matter of time how long he would hold out and how long his servants would tolerate him.

“So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh” [vs. 8]. This bringing back is done more or less forcefully by the servants who had just questioned their king. Apparently Pharaoh made no response to his underlings but was too dazed or too hardened of heart to pay attention, an image all the more vivid by being amid the incessant buzzing of locusts. While they made their way outside the palace as well as being brought before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron were unaffected by this swarm; the same may have applied to the servants since someone had to guide them back to the palace. Chances are that outside or away from Pharaoh these servants begged Moses to be patient with their lord, for they sensed he was close to giving him. As for this bringing back, it seems to have happened just as soon as they left. Upon their return Pharaoh uttered the familiar words but with hopefully certainty at the prodding of his servants, “Go, serve the Lord your God; but who are to go” [vs. 9]? In earlier requests Moses answered that the people are to go...no exceptions. The tone of this question intimates that Pharaoh was trying to force a bargain upon Moses; it would be fine if just a few people made the trek into the wilderness, the rest or the Israelites being held back a kind of ransom just in case.

“We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the Lord” [vs. 9]. Thus was Moses’ response to Pharaoh’s question; in other words, everyone will go along with their animals for sacrifice. Just the fact that herds was mentioned angered Pharaoh and hardened his heart yet once more. After all, the herds belonging to the Israelites were virtually the only ones left after the past few plagues. This is the first mention of *chag* or “feast,” a term implying a sacrificial victim. “Bind the festal procession (i.e., the sacrificial victim) with branches up to the horns of the altar” [Ps 118.27]!

“The Lord be with you if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind” [vs.

10]. Pharaoh's wish for the Lord of the Israelites to be with Moses seems to be a dismissal of sorts, of wanting to get rid of the source of so much trouble. The second half of this verse reads literally, "you have some evil before your face." That is to say, Moses has an undisclosed *rahaḥ* or evil (intent) he isn't telling Pharaoh about, a sign of growing despair on the ruler's part. One would wonder, however, what would happen should Pharaoh give permission for Israel to depart. Of course they would go to the wilderness to meet the Lord and if they had their own way, gladly would return to Egypt where they were better off than in the desert's harsh environment. Besides, their servitude to build supply cities was temporary (hopefully); once done, they would return to a life they and their ancestors had enjoyed for over four hundred years.

"No! Go, the men among you and serve the Lord, for that is what you desire" [vs. 11]. This is not what Moses desired (*baqash*: to search for); rather, he wished Israel as a group to depart and thus found Pharaoh's offer unacceptable; the women and children were to remain as a kind of surety. The verse at hand concludes with "And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence." The verb here is *garash* as used in 6.1: "He (Pharaoh) will drive them out of his land." Still, credit is owed to Pharaoh for this *garash*; he could have put Moses and Aaron to the sword.

"Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left" [vs. 12]. Here is another example of *natah*, of Moses stretching his hand over the entire land of Egypt as in 8.22 with the plague of hail. No words are said; this *natah* gesture is done in silence. Apparently the hail had left some grain and other food stuffs which are about to be consumed completely. An east wind was the agent that brought the locusts "all that day and all that night" [vs. 14]. That is to say, the locusts were unlike the frogs which came into the *gevuḥ* or literally, from all the borders of Egypt in 8.2, entering from the east or from the desert. Their arrival in Egypt is described as having "settled on the whole country" [vs. 14], *gevuḥ* being used here. It seems that the locusts came from an easterly direction and spread north, south and west until they reached the *gevuḥ* of Egypt. The verb for "settled" is *nuach* which intimates they came to a rest and went no further, almost as if to stay permanently. "The rod of the wicked shall not rest" [Ps 125.3]. The swarm was so thick that "the land was darkened" [vs. 15]. These locusts aren't mentioned as afflicting Israel as had been the case with other plagues, but it is presumed.

"Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in haste and said 'I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you' [vs. 16]. Messengers were sent out in this darkness caused by the locusts which must have been an unenviable task as they were barely able to find their way. This is the first time "in haste" or the verb *mahar* is used and connotes some impetuosity. "And the people hastened and passed over" [Jos 4.10]. In the meantime, Pharaoh had to bide his time plagued by the locusts just like everyone else. The first words out of his mouth were that he had sinned or *chatah* not unlike 9.27 after the devastating hail storm only this time Pharaoh asked forgiveness (cf. vs. 17) but put a condition upon his request, that is, "only this once." Immediately he asked Moses and Aaron to entreat (*hatar* as in 9.28) the Lord "to remove this death from me," an indication of this plague's severity on the heels of the hailstorm. Note that Moses did not *hatar* the Lord in Pharaoh's presence—for that would be an unclean thing to do—but "went out from Pharaoh" [vs. 18].

Just as an east wind had brought the locusts, so a west wind "drove them into the Red Sea; not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt" [vs. 19]. One can't help but consider this as a sign of things to come for Pharaoh and his army in their pursuit of the Israelites through the Red Sea. "But the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart" [vs. 20], *chazaq* being the verb which was last noted in 35.9 implying that the Lord had bound up his heart. By now Pharaoh has had several of these give-and-take experiences and was acquainted with them. It must have pained him just as much as the plagues; still he found no refuge from such violent shifts.

At last, the ninth and next-to-last plague: "Stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt" [vs. 21]. Pharaoh had no idea how many more plagues were in store for him but must have felt that the plagues thus experienced were building up to some type of unknown climax unfavorable for him and Egypt. With the Lord himself having hardened his heart, there was no escape and hence a sense of impending doom. Actually some of this darkness was experienced in the last plague, a darkness caused by the swarm of locusts. The noun at hand is *choshek* and can be a metaphor for misery.

“Are your wonders known in the darkness” [Ps 88.12]? Not only was Egypt enveloped by this *choshek*, it was one that was actually palpable, not unlike a garment weighing upon oneself or like trying to live under water. *Mush* is the verb “to be felt” which involves the sense of touch. “Draw near, that I may feel you” [Gen 27.21]. Vs. 22 further describes this darkness as thick or *’alpelah*, often used to describe misery. “We look for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom” [Is 59.9]. The duration of this darkness-to-be-felt is three full days where there is no distinction between day and night, making it longer than in actuality. Because such darkness weighed people down, they were forced to stop dead in their tracks and go nowhere. It’s one thing to grope around in darkness but quite another when it’s weighing upon you as a weight. As for the Israelites, they “had light where they dwelt” [vs. 24], that is to say, chiefly in the land of Goshen. Certainly they were aware of the *choshek* as a heaven-to-earth wall of blackness.

While not as devastating as the earlier plagues, this *choshek* brought Egypt to a complete halt as a sovereign nation, so imagine Pharaoh’s messengers attempting to make their way to Moses and Aaron under these conditions. Again the familiar refrain from Pharaoh: “Go, serve the Lord; your children also may go with you; only let your flocks and your herds remain behind” [vs. 24]. If we take the *choshek* in the way it had been presented, Pharaoh is in it while Moses and Aaron are behind him bathed in light. Moses protests, for “we do not know with what we must serve the Lord until we arrive there” [vs. 27]. Moses was partly correct; he had no idea as to this *havat* or service but knew it involved the sacrifice of animals. Pharaoh knew this as well which is why he refused to let the livestock go. So this exchanged ended more or less the same as the previous eight, that is, the hardened Pharaoh’s heart, *chazaq* being the verb at hand as in vs. 20.

The meeting ended more ominously than the others with Pharaoh saying “get away from me; take heed to yourself” [vs. 28]. The first part reads literally as “go from on me,” *hal* (on) suggestive of Moses being a thorn in Pharaoh’s side to be removed. Moses is ordered to *shamar* himself, that is, to keep guard over his future actions, a not so veiled threat of death: “for in the day you see my face you shall die.” “Only take heed and keep your soul diligently lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen” [Dt 4.9]. Chapter Ten had described the eighth and ninth plagues and concludes fittingly with Moses responding “As you say! I will not see your face again” [vs. 29]. There is a major exception, of course; in 10.31 Pharaoh summons Moses to leave Egypt once and for all, no exceptions.

Chapter Eleven

At last, the tenth and final plague which brings a resolution to the trying but wearisome back-and-forth recounted thus far. Despite Pharaoh having driven Moses and Aaron from his presence (cf. 10.28), vs. 8 implies that when Moses speaks in vs. 4, he is doing it in his presence. In the meantime, all the Israelites had assembled in the land of Goshen for the duration of the nine plagues in order to escape them. Thus they would be an easy target for an attack. Vs. 1 says that Pharaoh “will drive you away completely,” this being expressed by repetition of the verb *garash* first noted in 6.1 or before any of the plagues afflicted Egypt. Repetition serves more than a superlative; it is a doubling of the verb’s action, a way to make sure that it takes effect.

“Speak not in the hearing of the people that they ask, every man of his neighbor and every woman of her neighbor, jewelry of silver and of gold” [vs. 2]. As it was just noted, the Israelites had assembled in Goshen, so it was quite easy for all to receive these instructions, almost literally in their hearing. Gold and silver, of course, represented not just wealth that was laying around but personal wealth, a way of getting at the Egyptian people directly. This was unfortunate in some ways, for the people themselves weren’t responsible for Israel’s plight. It was also unfortunate in another more profound way; the silver and gold that had been despoiled would be Israel’s undoing in the creation of the gold calf (cf. Chapter Thirty-Two). “And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians” [vs. 3]. *Chen* is the noun for “favor” noted 3.21, a foretelling of this event about to be fulfilled: “thus you shall despoil the Egyptians.” The second sentence of vs. 3 states that “Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants and in the sight of the people.” That’s the reason why the Egyptians were about to be despoiled, the reputation of Moses who had afflicted Egypt with nine plagues. Each and every man, woman and child were touched directly by his actions and obviously were more than willing to part with their gold and silver. It was a way of concurring with

Pharaoh's desire, soon to be realized, of letting Israel depart once and for all.

"About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt" [vs. 4]. A short sentence, but it forms part of the larger vs. 5. Still, it is important to single out by reason of what will transpire, that is to say, the coming midnight. Note use of the preposition *betok* (in the midst of) signifying as in 10.1, in the center of the country, a time when most people were fast asleep. Vs. 5 states the purpose of this divine visitation: "and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die." *Bekor* is the word for "first-born" and also applies to the first-fruits of animals as well as produce. In ancient societies *bekor* was considered of great importance by way of establishing a lineage and line of succession. Even in 4.22 *bekor* is used with regard to Israel: "Israel is my first-born son." Even way back then an intimation lay hidden of what would transpire later. At first death of the first-born might not sound as bad as the other plagues simply because they had been so intrusive. However, it seems no widespread loss of life occurred with the exception of the plague of hail, and even that had advance warning, so casualties were not that high. This coming plague was silent and had lasting effects as it afflicted all classes of society not only by reason of the loss of life but by upsetting the order and standard represented by *bekor* whether human or animal as vs. 5 says. This same verse continues more or less as it had begun to emphasize the point: "and all the first-born of the cattle."

"And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt such as there has never been nor ever shall be again" [vs. 6]. In a sense, this intimates relief for the Egyptians; despite the terrible affliction, they can rest assured that they will not be afflicted again. The sooner the tenth plague is over, the better. *Tshaqah* is the noun for "cry" as found in 3.7, there with regard to the Israelites: "(the Lord) has heard their cry." The intimation is that while the Lord has heard the *tsahqah* of the Israelites but not that of the Egyptians but then again, will be leaving them alone for good.

"But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl" [vs. 7]. That is to say, when the first-born of man and beast are struck down, not even a dog shall raise its voice but remain silent, for even the dogs will suffer the same fate. Vs. 7 continues with "that you may know that the Lord makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel." The Israelites will know of this distinction by observation whereas the Egyptians will know it by pain and mourning. *Palah* is the verb for "makes a distinction" and implies a clear-cut separation. It was noted in 8.22: "But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen where my people dwell," that is, in preparation for the plague of flies.

Vs. 8 says that Pharaoh's servants will come to Moses saying "Get you out and all the people who follow you." However, they do this with reverence or by bowing down; not all shared Pharaoh's view of the Israelites who had been in their midst over four hundred years. Then and only then Moses "went out from Pharaoh in hot anger" [vs. 8]. *Chory* is the noun for "hot" used in conjunction with *'aph* or anger; in other words, both are used as a single word. "He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel" [Lam 2.3]. On the way out from the royal palace the Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you; that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt" [vs. 9]. Clearly Moses had first-hand experience of not being listened to but was at a loss as what to do next. He sensed that the nine plagues hadn't been effective and was about to return home in defeat. Aaron had done a good job as interpreter, so he too must have been dejected. Once in Goshen Moses was very much afraid that Pharaoh would invade that area and do away not just with him and Aaron but the Israelites. *Mopheth* is the word for "wonders" first noted in 4.21 as "miracles;" it is similar to a sign or *'oth* but of a more spectacular nature, often applicable to a future event and certainly has bearing in the context at hand.

Chapter Eleven concludes with "Moses and Aaron did all these wonders (*mopheth*) before Pharaoh; and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land" [vs. 10]. This is a short chapter but loaded in that it sets the stage for the tenth and final plague that will result in Israel's departure and the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. By this time the reader has become fully acquainted with this hardening (*chazaq* here as to bind) and is in the same position as Moses and Aaron awaiting what the Lord will do. As for the *mopheth* referred to, they are the nine plagues, not any additional ones. It seems Pharaoh did not take seriously the threat of the death of the first-born despite all the other *mopheth* having come to pass. Thus this *chazaq*, built upon earlier experiences, was the final "binding" of Pharaoh's heart from which he could not escape. Surely he knew that the death of all first-born would take

place, ignored warning from his servants and was left with no recourse but to wait and see.

A quick note about Jethro, Moses' father-in-law...although he remained in Midian, the land to which Moses would come with the Israelites or at Mount Horeb, the two must have remained in contact. Later in 18.1 Jethro "heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel his people," that is, he received a first-hand account. However, he must have been in contact with Moses during the time when the plagues had afflicted Egypt and Pharaoh had hardened his heart. After all, Jethro was at the holy mountain and must have received divine communication to support his son-in-law.