

Chapter Seven

As noted in the Introduction, the word 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, 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 (Abimelech) 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 signs 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 (*tanyim*).” Moses’ rod had become a *nachash*, the same term applied to the serpent in the garden of Eden whereas Aaron’s rod is a *tanyim*, 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, *tanyim* 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 *tanyim*, which means the alteration from rod to *tanyim* 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 *tanyim* 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, *gevul* 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]. One 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 ultimate reason 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 *érets* of Egypt, not in the wilderness where the Israelites could make good their escape. Perhaps Pharaoh had in mind the more specific *érets* 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 1s 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 *hey* 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. Once 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 *rahah* 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 *gevul* 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], *gevul* being used here. It seems that the locusts came from an easterly direction and spread north, south and west until their reached the *gevul* 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 *havad* 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 your self" [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 *tshaqah* 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.

Chapter Twelve

At long last, the tenth and final plague which sets in motion Israel’s departure from Egypt,

their home for over the past four-hundred years. For all practical purposes, that country and its rulers had treated them well, else they wouldn't have remained so long. The introductory verse of this chapter ('The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt') is significant because it's the first time words like "in Egypt" have been used. It may seem an obvious statement of fact but intimates that the days of remaining in that country are coming to a close rapidly. Furthermore, this verse is a continuation of the concluding verse of Chapter Eleven.

"This month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you" [vs. 2]. *R'osh* is the noun for "beginning" and *ri'oshon* the adjective for "first," both being derived from the same verbal root...thus we end up with a *r'osh* which is *re'oshon*. When Moses heard that the Lord was instituting a new form of marking time, i.e., a calendar, he knew something big was in the works; not just death of the first-born but Israel's departure from Egypt.

Once this momentous revelation is made, the Lord bids Moses to address Israel. "Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household" [vs. 3]. This telling (*davar*) is relatively easy, for all the Israelites had gathered in the compact land of Goshen in Egypt's northwest corner to escape the nine plagues. Even if Moses had told a small group, word would have spread by the end of the day, especially when it comes to a vital matter. *Hedah* is the noun for "congregation," the first time this word is found in the Bible and centers around the giving of testimony or precepts. In other words, *hedah* seems to be a regulatory or governing body and will be used frequently from now on. "Let the assembly of the peoples be gathered about you and over it take your seat on high" [Ps 7.7]. Now that "this month" [vs. 1] has been chosen, the Lord gets more specific, narrowing down to the tenth day. Note that on this particular day the lamb is to be taken "according to" [*L*] their fathers' houses," the preposition used as preface meaning literally "to" in the sense of in the direction of. This source for lambs is vital and not to be confused with lambs from among the Egyptians...one could argue that there are very few left after the series of plagues. Should a household be too small, vs. 4 offers provision, namely, that a person should join his neighbor or more practically, "according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb" [vs 4].

Vs. 5 offers two fundamental traits necessary for the lamb (a goat can be used; this is prior to Christ's distinction as in Mt 25.31-46), *tamym* and *zakar*: "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats." The first suggests completeness or wholeness: "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation" [Gen 6.9]. The second comes from a verbal root (same spelling) meaning "to remember" and was noted in 2.24: "And God remembered his covenant," the idea being that through a male child memory of past generations is carried forward and made present as well as guaranteeing continuation into the future. As for the image of a lamb, it is applied to Christ, one chief reference being 1Pt 1.18-19: "you were ransomed from the futile ways

inherited from your fathers...but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

Vs. 6 continues with the selective process of the lamb/goat for what will be known as the Passover sacrifice though as of yet it had not been given this name. “That it shall be kept until the fourteenth day of this month when the whole assemble of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening.” The first part of this reads literally, “and will be to you to a keeping (*mismereṯh*),” this noun being derived from the verbal root *shamar* (to keep) noted in 10.28: “Take heed to your self.” As for the word at hand, another reference (among many) is Num 9.23: “to do the service of for the people of Israel at the tent of meeting.” At the end of this special *mismereṯh* comes the time for slaughter, *shachat* being the verb applicable to sacrificial victims. “And he shall kill the lamb in the place where they kill the sin offering and the burnt offering, in the holy place” [Lev 14.13]. Vs. 3 mentions *hedah* or congregation, but here we have a refinement, *qahal* used with this noun...a *qahal* of *hedeth*...or a gathering which intimates that a group of people had assembled with the intent to enact or discuss an issue affecting their way of life and of regulating it by rules or laws. One reference to *qahal*: “A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you” [Gen 35.11]. As for the time of this *shachat*, it reads literally “between evenings” (*herev*, singular). That seems to mean the time from one evening or when the sun has just set through the night, on through the next day and continuing to the time of sunset the next day. It involves twilight, full darkness, full daylight and finally, a second (evening) twilight. Thus the Lord dispenses a liberal time span to effect this *shachat*, a full twenty-four hours. However, the intent is to be aware of the two boundaries of evening twilight or when the sun goes down...twice.

“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them” [vs. 7]. Most likely some, if not most, Israelites inquired among themselves the reason for this but intimated it was for some sort of divine protection. “Some of the blood” implies that the rest will be used for other purposes though that does not seem to be the case except for a repetition of this injunction in vs. 23. As for applying this blood, it is to be smeared upon the two doorposts and lintel...two vertical sides and one top horizontal side, not the threshold itself. What this blood is supposed to ward off doesn’t become clear until vs. 12 when the Lord himself will pass through Egypt to slay the first-born of men and animals. The three sides of an entrance to a house is a sufficient sign for the Lord to pass-over its residents. Leaving the threshold un-smeared at least invites the Lord to put his head in and see if all is well, but he will go no further. As for the sacrificial lamb/goat, “They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it” [vs. 8]. This method of preparation is spelled out further in vs. 9 saying that the lamb/goat must be roasted, not cooked in any other way. As for the time of eating, that would be several hours past sunset after the victim had been slain, certainly well before midnight. The unleavened bread or *matsah* means bread which has not been allowed several hours to rise, that is, bread made without yeast. Later on in 29.2 *matsah* is mentioned in conjunction with the consecration of priests

or when it has become formalized and thus ready to celebrate for future generations. As for the bitter herbs (*merorym*), only two other biblical references are used, Num 9.11 and Lam 3.15, the latter being cited here: “He has filled me with bitterness, he has sated me with wormwood.” As in the first two references (i.e., the one at hand), “herbs” is implied.

“And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn” [vs. 10]. So once the lamb/goat has been eaten—and leftovers were bound to remain—the scraps are to be burned. Nothing is said whether this is to be inside the homes protected by the smeared blood or outside. Given the fact that the blood was on the doorways, chances are the remains were cast into a fire within the homes.

Vs. 11 explains the manner in which the victim is to be eaten: “your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in hand; and you shall eat it in haste.” This must have clued Moses and Aaron more into the nature of this supper, that it was to be the last one in Egypt, followed by a hasty departure. *Maqel* is the word for “staff,” unlike the *match* belonging to Moses mentioned frequently above. It also applies to a twig or spear, something more slender, with this being the only use in Exodus. “I see a rod of an almond tree” [Jer 1.11]. Nothing is said about bags being packed for a journey; the people are to eat the meal “in haste” and therefore have no time to pack except grab what they could on the run. *Chiphazon* is the noun for “hasty flight” with two other biblical references (Dt 16.3 and Is 52.12), the former being cited here since it refers to the same event: “For you came out of the land of Egypt in hurried flight.” Vs. 11 continues with the simple yet definitive sentence, “It is the Lord’s Passover” or *Pesach*, from a verbal root also meaning to spare, to halt as noted in vs. 13. So when future generations of Israelites are to hear about commemorating the Passover, they are to recall it was a time of sparing them...and done in haste with a minimum of preparation. That means they were about to leave behind over four-hundred years of tradition and settlement in Egypt stemming back to Jacob and his sons at the invitation of Joseph and another Pharaoh, one who had been disposed kindly toward them. Where they were to go is unclear, for making a break with an established past all the more painful. Nothing is said about those Egyptians who must have intermarried with some Israelites; they are to be left behind in haste as well.

Now vs. 12 gets down to the actual reason for the Passover: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast.” Here *havar* is used, not *pasach* (that’s for vs. 13), the common verb used with the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to Egypt...“in Egypt.” Not only will the Lord *havar*-in Egypt, but he will “execute judgments” followed by the statement “I am the Lord.” *Sh’phatym* is masculine plural and was first noted in 6.6, that is, with regard to the ten plagues: “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.” Now the same *sh’phatym*, already effected through the first nine plagues, will reach fulfillment in this the last and tenth plague.

“The blood shall be a sign for you upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood,

I will pass over you and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt” [vs. 13]. Here blood equals *’oth* (sign), this term first noted in 3.12 with regard to serving God upon Mount Horeb: “this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you.” Vs. 12 has the verb *pasach* which, as noted above, connotes sparing compared with the more general *havar* of vs. 12. Apart from two other instances in Exodus, *pasach* is found four times, one of which is 1s 31.5: “He will protect and deliver it (Jerusalem); he will spare and rescue it.” In the verse at hand, *pasach* is used with the preposition *hal-* (on, upon) prefaced to the noun “you,” different from the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to “Egypt” used with *havar* in vs. 12. Taken literally, this means that the Lord, upon seeing blood smeared upon lintels and doorposts, will *pasach*-upon those houses, bounding up over them from the ground and landing on the other side. Though nothing is said about those Israelites who fail to carry out the divine injunction, chances are they would suffer the same fate as the Egyptians or if not, would be left behind after the impending exodus. As for those Egyptians and Israelites just mentioned without a first-born (male and female), they will be spared; already they had suffered enough and don’t need to be afflicted further.

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord” [vs. 14]. First comes “this day” or the day of *Pasach* as one of “memorial” or *zikaron* (the verbal root *zakar* or to remember was noted above) which means it is to be recalled just as any event. However, this is a special event—one to define Israel itself for all posterity—that it alters one’s entire life and society or those who participate in this *zikaron*. That’s why the Passover as *zikaron* is to be kept (*chagag*; last noted in 5.1 which mentions the connotation of dancing) as a *chag* (last noted in 10.9). Dancing is a physical engagement done in public which makes the occasion that much easier to recall. In the case at hand, we have the actual event about to transpire, the elements of which are being laid out now by the Lord. Those who participate in the Passover are to attune their memories in a special way as first witnesses to an event that must be repeated not just the next year but indefinitely into the future. That’s important, to get the details down. Once the first celebration (a year hence) is complete, the details will have been worked out, making it that much easier for the second celebration. This may take some years of refinement, especially to weed out unnecessary or superfluous details, but given the supreme importance of the event at hand, it is recounted quite accurately and with greater ease than one would suppose. Again, that’s due to Passover being the defining event in Israelite history which takes on a different slant once the Torah is revealed. Vs. 14 continues with “throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance forever.” *Choq* is the common noun for “ordinance” and is used in another sense in 5.14: “Why have you not done all your tasks of making bricks today as hitherto?” Also the verb *chagag* is repeated as “shall observe” in conjunction with future generations which is that special way by which yet-to-be-born generations will facilitate their recollection of Passover through a physical act, not just something repeated by words.

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread” [vs. 15]. That is today, seven days after the Passover or for six more days which intimates that the Israelites are to be in a state of readiness for a whole week, reminiscent of Jesus’ parable about the ten virgins, five of whom

were prepared and five of whom were not. *Chamets* is the word for unleavened bread and is a verb–bread which has been leavened or made sour–and occurs seven other times in the Bible, two of which are in Exodus. In other words, bread has been left to turn sour or not allowed to rise and thus remains flat and relatively tasteless. For an alternate meaning of this verb, see Ps 73.21: “Thus my heart was grieved.” Vs. 15 says that before one makes unleavened bread–and that should be done in short order–“you shall put away leaven out of your houses.” Not that leaven will somehow make its way into the flour but that even its presence tucked away in a kitchen shelf will be enough to disqualify that household from celebrating the Passover. And so, getting rid of leaven is the task of the first day which involves scouring one’s house for any trace of it. Should some leaven be found and used for baking regular bread, “that person shall be cut off from Israel” as vs. 15 continues. *Nephesh* is the noun for person which often refers to the human soul or any living creature as in Gen 1.20: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.” As for the verb “shall be cut off,” it is *karath*, the root for covenant as something that has been cut; it also means to destroy as in Lev 7.12 (it uses *nephesh* for ‘person’ as the verse at hand): “that person shall be cut off from his people.” To be *karath* is the worst form of removal from Israel, especially at this early stage when that people had not yet departed Egypt. To be *karath* in this instance is to suffer the same fate as death of the first born, only instead of being killed, that person will remain alive or stuck behind in Egypt after one’s native people has departed.

“On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly and on the seventh day a holy assembly” [vs. 16]. These two types of assemblies seem different from the Passover proper; then again, they can represent Passover as spread out over an extended period of time mirroring the six days of creation followed by the seventh of God resting from it. “First day” reads more properly “day one” in accord with these seven days of creation where a given day is stated first followed by its enumeration, thereby lending greater significance to each segment of time, more stretched out than the common twenty-four hour cycle. Such a manner of stating time can be taken as a *kairos*. Later perception of a day evolved into the evening before through the evening of the next day, hence embracing two sunsets. *Miqrah* is the noun for “solemn assembly,” derived from the common verb *qara’* (to call) suggesting that all the people will be summoned by word of mouth. This noun appears seven other times in the Bible; Neh 8.8 brings out the sense of *qara’* as reading in common or in public: “and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.” Here the preposition *b-* (in) prefaced to *miqrah* suggests that the reading is done “in” the people, that they grasp it fully. As for the verse at hand, *miqrah* is to be read on “day seven” which reflects the day when God rested from his work recounted in Genesis. Though both nouns are used, “day one” and “day seven.” Obviously there is a difference; on the other five days a *miqrah* is not to be held thereby offering a period to reflect upon that belonging to “day one” and how it leads up to “day seven.” “Day one” of Genesis differs from “day seven” (and the other, of course) but such is not the case here. The Passover “day one” is to be the primary event itself followed by five days of reflection and culminating in a second *miqrah* which recaps the previous six days. Interestingly, “no work shall be done on those days” as vs. 16 continues. In other words the *miqrah* precludes labor of any kind. While the five intervening days

permit work, the text implies that work is to be limited to what is necessary. Finally, lengthy vs. 16 concludes with “but what everyone must eat, that only may be prepared by you.” Since “day one” of the *migrāh* requires preparation, it seems that food for the other six days must be prepared then as well.

Vs. 17 fleshes out a bit more observance of the *shamar* of the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread (‘feast’ not being mentioned): “for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt.” *Hetsem* is the word for “very” which alternately can read as “itself,” a way to distinguish the day at hand from all others. An alternative for *hetsem* is “bone:” “Now this is bone of my bones” [Gen 2.23] or more apropos to the text at hand, “this very one in front of me.” So with *hetsem* aligned with “day one” or the Passover day itself, it takes precedence over “day seven” which is a culmination of that day and the five which had come after it. Also the Passover took place on the actual day of deliverance when the Lord “brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt,” these hosts being *tsava’* (singular) or the same battle-array formation noted in 6.26: “Bring the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts.” Again, “day one” is to be kept (second use of *shamar*) “as an ordinance (*chuqah*) forever.” Vs. 18 more or less repeats the time of the Passover which had been stated in vs. 6, refining it “from the fourteenth day...until the twenty-first day,” this verse designating both days by evening.

“For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses” [vs. 19]. That is to say, no *matsah* (first noted in vs. 8), used for making regular bread, is to be put away, this verse being a repetition of vs. 15. There a person (*nephesh*: soul) will be cut off (*karath*) from Israel whereas here a person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel or *hedah* (cf. vs. 3) which is more specific. Such a *hedah* is more inclusive than the Israelites, for it includes both sojourners and natives of the land. As for the former, *ger* was mentioned first in 2.22 as applicable to Moses residing in Midian and again in 6.4 with reference to the Israelites dwelling in Canaan. Possibly those who fell under this category referred to here are those who migrated with Israel into Egypt from Canaan and became attached to that people throughout their extended stay. Nevertheless, that prolonged period of time did not make them full-fledged members despite their lengthy affiliation; at the same time there were sufficiently allied to Israel in order to share in their impending departure from Egypt. As for “natives of the land,” the word is *‘ezrach*; from the verbal root *zarach* (to rise) and refers to descendants of a given place, hence it’s used with *‘erets* (land). A person who falls under the category of *‘ezrach* seems to be an Israelite and the *‘erets* at hand is more specifically Goshen originally prescribed by the anonymous Pharaoh sympathetic to Joseph four centuries ago. The Book of Leviticus contains the most references to *‘ezrach* in its various prescriptions, one reference being 16.29: “and shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you.”

After the Lord had presented Moses with an explanation of the Passover and the rules governing it, vs. 20 stresses the importance of having no *matsah* (leaven) within a house. It stands out as integral to the text and as symbolic of haste, of not lingering in Egypt. “You

shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”

Vs. 21 signals the transition from impartation of divine instructions about the Passover to their transmission to the elders of Israel. Usually in such a process some information is lost, forgotten or distorted. Not so with Aaron as Moses’ mouthpiece who formed a perfect copy of what the Lord imparted to Moses: He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God” [4.16]. “Select lambs for yourselves according to your families and kill the Passover lamb.” The elders were heads of households, local leaders in the community, who quickly could spread Moses’ words mediated through Aaron. Given the urgency of the situation, these elders were exact copies of Aaron’s ability to speak for Moses. As for the verse at hand, the Hebrew text has “select and take,” the first verb being *mashak* which means to draw out. “Draw me, we will run after you” [Sg 1.4]. The second is the common verb *laqach*. Note the division, families or *mishpachah* (singular) which also refers to tribes as well as kinds of animals. It is first mentioned in Gen 8.19—not with regard to creation but after the departure of animals from Noah’s ark on in the new creation: “—went forth by families out of the ark.” And so we have the first clear identity between a lamb and the Passover though it had been implied (NB: goat was mentioned as an alternative to a lamb in vs. 5. However, it seems to have fallen out of favor).

“Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin” [vs. 22]. *Agudah* is the noun for “bunch” which refers to anything gathered into a bundle and hence tied. Also it can refer to that which is arched or vaulted. Only two other biblical references pertain to the former and one to the latter which is quoted here: “who builds his upper chambers in the heavens and founds his vault upon the earth” [Am 9.6]. As for “hyssop,” the word is *ezov* as in Ps 51.7: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.” *Ezov* provides a fine instrument to apply the blood from the slain Passover lamb because it consists of woody branches with aromatic leaves thus scenting the odorless sacrificial blood. With one (or more) pieces of hyssop the Israelites are to apply this scented blood upon the lintels and doorposts of their homes, the verb being *nagah* which more particularly means to touch as well as to draw near. For the latter, see Ezk 7.12: “the day draws near.” That is to say, the hyssop isn’t used to be a sprinkling device...an aspergillum...but implies more a smearing which is more thorough, not unlike painting. Thus three parts of the entrance are marked. As for keeping doors open or closed, the second half of vs. 22 suggests that latter. While the thresholds are not smeared, this allows the Lord to peep inside the houses without entering. This is to be fulfilled later in the Song of Songs with “Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattices” [2.9]. Vs. 22 concludes with “and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.” Morning (*boqer*) applies more to sunrise which during this very special night must have been anticipated greatly. All the Israelites were sequestered in their homes which means they hadn’t a clue as to exactly what was transpiring outside. Since the Lord was in the process of slaying the first born (to be described shortly), the Israelites surely were aware of the screams of horror at these deaths

or more accurately, the parents' piercing cries throughout the night.

"For the Lord will pass through to slay the Egyptians" [vs. 23]. Here we have the first of two verbs relevant to the Lord's transit, *havar* as in vs. 12 ('For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night') with the second or *pasach* as follows: "the Lord will pass over the door." Thus *havar* and *pasach* work hand-in-hand with the former signifying a going-through and the latter, the same going-through but with the intent to spare. *Nagaph* is the verb for "slay" as found in 8.2: "I will plague all your country with frogs." Thus in the minds of the Israelites *nagaph* is associated with the plague of frogs compared to other inflictions recently experienced, that the Egyptians will be plagued. The image obtained from vs. 23 is that the Lord will see (the common *ra'ah* is used) lamb's blood smeared at the lintels and doorposts of each house suggesting that he will be walking through the cities, towns and villages of Egypt. Most were situated up and down the Nile River. The same applies to the Egyptians, so the Nile itself became a means for conveying unspeakable grief. And so the interaction between *havar* and *pasach* may be put as follows: the Lord *havar* Egypt, sees the blood and then spares (*pasach*) that household. If he does not see the blood (both of Israelites and certainly the Egyptians), he will not *pasach* but enter and slay any first born. More precisely, the Lord will not enter but his destroyer: "he will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to slay you." This destroyer or *mashchyth* (better as the noun destruction) is a kind of angel of death as in 2Sam 24.16: "And when the angel stretched forth his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the Lord repented of the evil." Here the verb *shachat* (as in vs. 5 regarding slaying the Passover lamb) is used which forms the root for *mashchyth*. As for this word, one reference among ten is 2Chron 20.23: "they all helped to destroy (to destruction) one another." And so the image is of the Lord first engaged in *havar* followed by (hopefully) *pasach* or sparing...not alone but accompanied by *mashchyth* who will "slay you" or *nagaph* (i.e., will plague you).

"You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and your sons forever" [vs. 24]. *Shamar* is the verb as in vs. 17 regarding the feast of unleavened bread, *davar* being the noun for "rite" or that which is spoken (from the verbal root of the same spelling). This *shamar* is not to be done occasionally but forever. Since the first Passover is about to take place, it is vital for those elders of vs. 21 whom Moses is addressing to get all the facts straight. That's the value of having Aaron as a mediator though he isn't mentioned here but presumed to be privy to all the details. And so *shamar* as keeping watch or as attending to begins this very night and extends throughout all eternity.

The first keeping of Passover as a *davar*—not the first or actual one in Egypt but outside its bounds—is provided for in the next verse: "And when you come to the land which the Lord will give you as he has promised, you shall keep this service" [vs. 25]. At first one would think this keeping or *shamar* is one year from this night. Not so, for the Israelites were to wander forty years in the wilderness during which there was no true Passover. That is to say, the Passover is to give way (at least during forty years of wandering in the desert) to the bestowal of the Torah. Such ambiguity increases the weight of that burden of memory

upon the elders. The promise harkens back to Moses' first encounter with the Lord: "to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land...to the place of the Canaanites (etc.)" or the land prior to Jacob's migration to Egypt. Though Egypt (more specifically Goshen or the principle settlement area for Israelites) and Canaan are relatively close and contact was maintained throughout the four hundred years, chances are the Israelites had turned their backs on the "good and broad land" simply because Goshen provided such a boon. As for that land which the Lord had promised, the verb is *davar* (for the Lord to speak is as good as for him to promise) but is coupled with another use of *shamar*, to guard or protect.

At this point halfway through Chapter Twelve or the impartation of observance for the soon-to-be actualized Passover, it does well to recall the connective words "and," "then," "but" and "now," all being one letter/word, *w-* prefaced to the beginning word of each sentence. Its importance lies in the fact that virtually every verse of Exodus is connected to show continuous action. *W-* as connective is even more significant for such a pivotal event as the Passover because the details are presented one after another with the intent that those receiving them will not just remember them but will use them to set in motion a new phase of their religion that had been missing up to now. That is to say, the Israelites will be required to recall (*shamar*) the Passover, the first real liturgical action done in common. Prior to this point an occasional recollection of the patriarchs and their deeds in Canaan might have been noted but nothing more. Although the Israelites were faithful, they remained exposed to the Egyptian deities which could wear them down further until all recollection of their past had been lost. This puts the forty year period of wandering in the wilderness in better perspective though neither Moses nor the Israelites had a clue it would last so long. During this time the people were allowed to purify themselves of four hundred years of living in Egypt and of getting instruction as to the Passover prior to entry into Canaan. In other words, to move directly from Egypt into Canaan—an easy march of several days—would have been the equivalent of inserting Egyptian habits and customs directly into their ancestral homeland. That means living in Canaan would make little difference from their previous abode in Egypt.

One key element of *shamar*, of keeping in the sense of recollection, lies in the great value of Israelite children. They form the next generation which will be responsible for the actual transmission of the Passover event into a *davar* or service (thing spoken, cf. vs. 25) which is what the Lord has in mind in vs. 26: "And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this *havodah* (service)?" Though the Lord is anticipating a future response (and correctly so), he has in mind that those too young to recall the actual Passover or those who never have witnessed it. Instead, they will be relying upon how the elders in vs. 21 went about the vital task of preserving memory of the past. There was always the chance that while the Israelites were promised by the Lord to inherit the land, that very land could be taken over by native tribes hostile to them. Thus the need for *shamar* of the Passover transcends the place in which the Israelites might find themselves. In the verse at hand, note the use of *havodah*, the same word in 6.9 with negative implications: "but they did not

listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage.” So for future generations the *davar* or promise becomes transformed into a thing to be worked or served, not a “cruel bondage,” one fundamental meaning of the verbal root *havad*.

Vs. 27 spells out this *havodah* or thing-to-be-done: “You shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover.” In other words, *havodah* equals *zevach*, that which the Lord wished back in 3.18 on Mount Horeb but with the significant addition of Passover to distinguish it from earlier requests. The numerous requests Moses had made to Pharaoh for *zevach* all were to be done in the wilderness; this one is to take place not there but here in Egypt on the threshold of their departure from that land. The next Passover sacrifice—not until some forty years had passed, to be more exact—would be celebrated once the Israelites had left the wilderness though at this stage they hadn’t a clue about this. “For he passed over (*pasach*) the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses.” Vs. 27 continues with the addition of *natsal* first noted in 3.8 (‘and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians’). Finally the same verse ends with “And the people bowed their heads and worshiped,” the same response in 4.31 when Aaron had communicated the Lord’s words to Moses about their impending deliverance. This willingness is followed by compliance as vs. 28 recounts: “Then the people of Israel went and did so.”

“At midnight the Lord smote all the first born in the land of Egypt from the first born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first born of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the first born of the cattle” [vs. 29]. At last, the long-awaited, long-feared event which many Israelites and most likely Moses and Aaron, though they wouldn’t admit it, thought would never come. Without a doubt, credit is owed them; they followed the injunction to slay the Passover lamb and eat unleavened bread in a mode fit for a journey as they prepared to leave the land they called home for some four centuries. As for the time midnight (literally half-night in Hebrew), chances are that ancients determined it with some exactitude by position of the stars. They did not know, however, that half way through the night was when the Lord would come, so the time from dusk to midnight must have been one of extreme anxiety. As for the Egyptians? They hadn’t a clue except for Pharaoh and those in his court who heard the threat laid against them. Tonight was a night like any other. Yet a clue was present for anyone attentive enough. The Egyptians saw their Israelites neighbors staying up much later than usual. For so many to do this must have struck them as odd but then again, the Egyptians may have written them off as performing just another one of their strange religious rituals. The unexpected and total nature of the Passover is heightened by two extremes: from Pharaoh to those deep in a dungeon. However, among animals cattle alone are mentioned (a major source of food and trade) which implies that other types such as sheep, goats and fowl are exempt. To wipe out all animals after so many plagues would have meant the end of Egypt, an invitation for her neighbors to take advantage of her weakness.

“And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians” [vs. 30].

This *qum* or rising almost on cue by virtually every inhabitant is dramatic indeed; it took place exactly the same time the Israelites had been awake and now were celebrating the Passover, the one upon which all others would rest. Perhaps the waking was followed by the full realization that the Israelites did not go to sleep because they knew this tragedy was about to take place. They Egyptians must have been filled with bitter regret for not having inquired earlier as to why the Israelites hadn't gone to bed which only served to increase their pain of loss. So if all first born were slain, that means automatically the second born assumed their place. They must have been especially fearful; if the Lord had inflicted such a blow, what about the future? So later when the Egyptians ran the Israelites out of their country, the second born must have been in the forefront urging them on with loud voices in case their turn was next. They were hard pressed not to kill the Israelites but restrained themselves in case an even greater plague would strike. Vs. 30 heightens the drama already stated with "and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where one was not dead." *Tshaqah* is word for "cry" found in 11.6, a prediction of this event: "And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt such as there has never been nor ever shall be again."

"And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night" [vs. 31], *qara'* being the verb which means to call as had been noted several times earlier. No doubt, Pharaoh was mindful of the audience recounted in Chapter Eleven as well as those many times his heart had been hardened. Pharaoh had no problem summoning the two brothers some time between midnight and dawn; most of his servants had just lost their first born and were eager as he to get to the bottom of this. And so these servants quickly made their way through the streets while passing countless homes in desperate mourning. At the same time the homes of Israelites were deserted; they had quietly departed for Goshen in preparation for their departure. The Passover meal had been eaten, the first born of Egyptians had been slain, but now what? As for Moses and Aaron, they knew Pharaoh would summon them during the night, most likely before dawn. They remained in the vicinity of the royal palace, not in Goshen, knowing full well that they would be called there, and when word came, they left for the place with some trepidation. Surely Pharaoh's servants questioned them en route. "Why?" was obviously on top of their minds...why did the Lord bring such a catastrophe upon our first born? Vs. 31 continues with Pharaoh saying, "Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go serve the Lord as you have said." Note the use of *qum* ('rise up') a second time in fairly quick succession, the first when Pharaoh and the Egyptians rose at midnight when the Lord slew their first born. Thus *qum* intimates a getting ready at once which in the case of the Israelites, certainly no problem for them. They were ready long before the time of celebrating the Passover meal. The sense of *qum* is intensified by the order to leaven not so much Egypt but "from among my people" or from *betok* my people, that word meaning "in the midst of" as noted in 11.4, an ominous prediction of the final plague: "About midnight I will go forth in the midst of Egypt." The words which follow—"and go serve the Lord as you have said"—are for real this time, no hardening of Pharaoh's heart being mentioned for such is the result of all those previous hardenings.

As for the final encounter between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh, it ends on what appears to be a note of reconciliation ('and bless me also,' vs. 32) though soon Pharaoh would betray the Israelites by one final and absolute act of revenge. Such words come more from desperation. It is not recorded whether or not the brothers did bless Pharaoh. Perhaps they did, just out of personal safety and relief that their lengthy and fruitless encounters with him were at last over.

"And the Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste, for they said, 'We are all dead men'" [vs. 33]. *Chazaq* is the verb for "were urgent," a verb often used to describe the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. In the case at hand, the Egyptians were so hardened against the Israelites that instead of slaying them (deep down they'd like to do this but were terrified to carry it out, divine revenge), single-mindedly they rose up to expel them from their midst. Full well they knew that they would lose a population which for four hundred had been an economic boon for Egypt, but better without them than to be inflicted with more plagues. The intensity of *chazaq* is enhanced by the preposition *hal* (upon) prefaced to "the people," that is, "upon the people." It is continued by two uses of the preposition *l* (to) prefaced to the two verbs *mahar* and *shalach*... "to be quick" and "to send." The Egyptians, claiming to be already "dead men," now work in favor of the Israelites in that they knew that by doing so, they had no reprisals to fear.

When vs. 34 says that the Israelites "took their dough before it was leavened (etc.)," they had no real bread with which to celebrate the Passover meal just several hours ago. Any unleavened bread would have to be consumed in flight for which they had been prepared ('your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand,' vs. 11). So this bringing along of unleavened bread suggests that the Passover extended its influence well beyond that night when the Lord slew the first born; they would eat it on the shore of the Red Sea just before crossing it.

Vss. 35-6 recount what might be termed a despoiling of the Egyptians...not quite accurate because the Israelites asked (*sha'al*) for jewelry and clothing. No problem with clothing which has immediate, practical use, but jewelry? It was of no advantage in the desert but probably was asked for simply because it was portable and of potential value. Once the Israelites reached Canaan in a few days (supposedly), they could use this jewelry to purchase items and land. Regardless, the Israelites demonstrated that they hadn't a clue as to their destination except to worship the Lord in the desert and later would melt down this jewelry to fashion a golden calf. Though the drama unfolding before their eyes intimated their departure was final, many harbored thoughts that it might be temporary. Once having done obeisance to the Lord, they would return to familiar and comfortable Goshen, thereby settling down to a newly chastened Egypt and Pharaoh. In the verses at hand, "the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians," that is, *chen* as predicted in 11.3. Such *chen* was given while the Egyptians were in the very act of being despoiled or *natsal* which was noted last in vs. 27 but in a different sense: "but spared our houses."

“And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot besides women and children” [vs. 37]. Before this journey (*nasah*: to remove, depart), the Israelites had to muster together at pre-arranged places within Goshen on the northwest corner of Egypt, that fertile area which had been bestowed by another Pharaoh to Joseph and his brothers. That wasn’t difficult despite the large amount of people. It doesn’t matter whether the number is an exaggeration; it shows how fruitful and generous the land of Egypt had been for four centuries even in later years of repression. “The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad” [1.12]. Besides, many householders must have combined to celebrate the Passover. Despite this high concentration of Israelites in Goshen, surely others were scattered throughout Egypt or along the Nile River. Since the Nile area was virtually the only place where people could live, it was easy and quick for them to journey north on boat to Goshen. En route they must have passed countless household still mourning the death of their first born and had a sense of guilt that they were partly responsible.

Thus this mustering must have taken place under the cover of night. Actually this was an extended night, the night of the Passover, because in addition to celebrating the meal, the Israelites had journeyed from Rameses to Succoth after having gathered from all around Egypt. Accompanying the Israelites from Rameses to Succoth was “a mixed multitude” [vs. 38], the two words being *herev* and *rav*. The former comes from the verbal root *harav* meaning to mix as well as to pledge (and several other sub-meanings). Ten other similar biblical references exist, nine of which are in Chapter Thirteen of Leviticus meaning “woof:” “in warp or woof of linen or wool” [vs. 48]. As for *rav*, it’s an adjective modifying *herev*. No specifics are given as to this motley group, but chances are it contained those who migrated from Canaan into Egypt by reason of the famine for which Joseph had provided as well as others from that area who had been sympathetic toward Israel. Even an indefinite number of Egyptians might be included, especially those who still retained memories of gratitude toward Joseph who literally saved their country.

“And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened because they were thrust out of Egypt” [vs. 39]. The verb for “thrust” is *garash* noted in 11.1, a foretelling of the Passover: “he (Pharaoh) will drive you away completely.” This sudden expulsion prevented the Israelites from tarrying (as vs. 39 continues) or *mahah*, a verb suggestive of denying or refusing (*mehumah* or commotion is a noun derived from it). “Ehud escaped while they tarried” [Judg 3.26]. This double sense of *mahah*, if you will, fits in with the situation at hand because the Israelites both tarried and were in a state of commotion, that is, while still within the bounds of Egypt.

Vs. 40 inserts an important fact, that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. Israelite scribes must have kept account of this but as noted above in several places, we have no record of their religious practices or how the people fared. The

presumption is that all went reasonably well, a fact often noted but overlooked; they had the option of returning to nearby Canaan, about a week's journey to the east, but never returned there. In the next verse (41) *behetsem hayom* refers to the day after the night of the Passover meal, "on that very day," *hetsem* noted in vs. 12 alternately as "itself" and even has the alternate meaning of "bone" which signifies the very heart of the matter at hand. Thus *hetsem* as applicable to the day refers more specifically to that lengthy night of Passover meal, the slaying of the first born and mustering at Succoth, all which coincide with the 430th anniversary of Israel coming into Egypt. Such is the significance assigned to that anniversary; the numerical significance is unimportant, for if it was the Israelites were ascribing significance to some type of fate or happenstance as opposed to divine intervention. And so the day at hand which is *hetsem* or out of the ordinary actually refers to the night of the Passover which is the only night in history that is longer than others by reason of the events that transpired within it. Another fact which abolishes the tendency to perceive numerical representation as bound up with fate is a sense of history. That is to say, the attitude of one human being who happened to be Pharaoh and how his stubbornness helped precipitate the departure of Israel from his land. As for the departure of the Israelites, it was not done haphazardly but in an organized form not unlike an army or as hosts or *tsava'* (singular) last noted in vs. 17.

"It was a night of watching by the Lord to bring them out of the land of Egypt" [vs. 42]. The phrase "night of watching" gives a clear idea of why the Passover celebrated at that time had extended well beyond the normal dusk-to-dawn period. During this night the Lord himself was engaged in a prolonged *shamar* or watching as in vs. 24 ('You shall observe this rite as an ordinance forever'). And so, *shamar* stands at the very core of Israelite religion, much more so than it might have in the past as a loose recollection of various deeds by the patriarchs in Canaan. This *shamar* will be centered around the Torah or Law, notably Psalm 119, which of all the Psalms has the most occurrences of that verb. Of course, *shamar* isn't confined there but is found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy with respect to Torah which, it should be noted, was an new institution yet to be born. *Shamar* translates over into observance at this specific time as vs. 42 continues: "so this same night (*hetsem* isn't used here) is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations." Emphasis shifts from "watching by the Lord" to "watching kept to the Lord" where the divine *shamar* is assumed by the Israelites. Those original participants realized the significance of *shamar*, for they were responsible for handing it over to the next generation and those two or three afterwards who retained some memory of the original event, if not directly then from next-to-directly. From that point forward when no witnesses were left, this *shamar* would have to be ritualized to some degree for preservation "throughout all their generations."

The remaining verses (43-51) of Chapter Twelve are a kind of supplement attributed to the so-called priestly tradition where some more details as to observance of the Passover are laid down ('And the Lord said to Moses'). While reserved for Israelites, allowance is made for some categories such as slaves through the ritual of circumcision or *mulah*. The first

reference to this practice in Exodus is 4.26 when Moses' wife Zipporah said "You are a bridegroom of blood' because of the circumcision" which despite its long extra-Israelite history is perhaps why later before the Lord Moses recalls the experience when he claims to be a "man of uncircumcised lips" [6.12]. As for the verses at hand, they seem to apply more to future celebrations of the Passover, not the original one, where it was too late to carry out circumcision on such a large group of males. The same ordinance refers to non-Israelites (cf. vs. 48), that they require circumcision prior to eating the Pasch. This caution towards non-Israelites is necessary lest the tradition of Passover be distorted or watered-down over time. For example, "in one house shall it be eaten; you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside the house." Such an injunction means that the Passover lamb is to be eaten indoors away from the prying eyes of both Egyptians and non-Israelites.

As for the words "you shall not break a bone of it" in the same verse, later it is applied to Christ on the cross just after he had expired (cf. Jn 19.36). This quote is prefaced by "that the scripture might be fulfilled" implying that the original Pasch, important as it might be, has yet to attain consummation. No one at the time realized this though Moses may have had some intimation by reason of his familiarity with the Lord. "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it" [vs. 47] or the entirety signified by *hedah* noted in vs. 19, more inclusive than a *qahal*, for it includes both sojourners and others. Instead of the *shamar* or keeping noted in the last paragraph, the common verb *hasah* is used (to do, accomplish) meaning that the actual rites are to be effected, the whole of which, if you will, consists in the *shamar* of the Passover. This cautionary approach is verified by the non-Israelites being able to "come near and keep it" [vs. 48]. First comes *qarav* ('and all the congregation drew near and stood before the Lord,' Lev 10.9) or approaching followed by a *hasah* or doing of the Pasch. And so the process of indoctrination...a type of mystagogia...results in these persons becoming "as a native of the land." *Ezrach* is the word for "native" as found in vs. 19 which refers to an Egyptian but here one fully incorporated into the Israelite community which is associated with *érets* or "land." Even though the Israelites had not returned to their ancestral homeland of Canaan and made it into their *érets*, still being considered an *ezrach* of that *érets* is as good as realization of that distant deed.

"There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you" [vs. 49]. Such concludes the "priestly" injunctions beginning in vs. 43. Torah is the law (yet to be given) yet here can apply to circumcision of every male member of Israel, native or otherwise. Chapter Twelve concludes with the observation that the Israelites did as the Lord had commanded and more specifically, "On that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts" [vs. 51]. And so we have another use of *hetsem* (very) used in the same sense as in vs. 41. There as here reference is to "day" as opposed to night which can be expanded to include a larger period of time than the normal twenty-four hour cycle...not unlike one of the seven days of creation. In fact, it is a new day of creation for Israel. They were departing the *érets* ('land of Egypt') constituted in essence as that *érets* of Israel-as-*hedeth* which later will take root in Canaan.

Chapter Thirteen

This chapter is a kind of interlude between the preliminaries to Israel's actual departure from Egypt and its accomplishment, dealing with the important matter of the consecration of the first born (human and animal) which took place shortly after the death of the Egyptian first born both of man and beast. *Qadash* is the verb for "consecrate" (fundamentally it means to be pure or clean), the root for the familiar adjective "holy." Actually this is the first time *qadash* appears in Exodus suggesting that it was unfamiliar to the Israelites. Here it is bound up with the notion of redemption which the Lord spells out later within this chapter. "Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly" [Jl 1.14]. To demonstrate the exclusivity of the first born, the Lord says "is mine" or in Hebrew, "is to (*L*) me." Part of the reason for the importance attributed to the first born among ancients is the high infant mortality rate. The second born would (presumably) move into the first position should the first born die, and such must have been the case in many instances. Thus with the added promise of divine protection the first born would have a higher chance of surviving the early years of childhood.

"And Moses said to the people, 'Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place' [vs. 3]. The injunction "remember" or *zakar* first noted in 2.24 ('and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Issac and with Jacob') forms the root for the noun "male" or *zakur*. "Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God" [23.17]. It should be noted that a distinction exists between *zakur* and *bekor* (first born). The former applies to a male child whereas the latter not necessarily so though often that is the case. So when Moses bids the people to remember, implied is that they beget or give birth to that which they are commemorating; what has come to birth doesn't pass away but matures over a period of time into adulthood. When *zakar* is applied to "this day," it means day as described towards the end of Chapter Twelve, day in the Genesis sense of "day one," etc. And so the "day" at hand is more inclusive than a twenty-four hour cycle.

Two elements are vital to a *zakar* of "this day" in vs. 3 with respect to the preposition *min* (from) prefaced to two words: "house of bondage" and "this place," the two basically meaning the same. The way the Lord mentions "this place" suggests contempt; in fact, "place" isn't in the Hebrew but has "from this." As for "bondage" (*heved*), it is reminiscent way back to 2.23 when the Lord had taken notice of it, *havodah* being the word. In the verse at hand, *heved* is associated with "house" suggestive that the *heved* became a permanent feature of Israel's life in Egypt, not what they had reckoned for four hundred years ago. Vs. 3 concludes with the familiar injunction, "no leavened bread shall be eaten" because the Israelites are to hasten from both the "house of bondage" and "this place." It had been noted earlier that perception of the Israelites being maltreated by the current Pharaoh had been part of their lives since their arrival in Egypt or after Joseph and the Pharaoh whom he served had died. Not necessarily so. If this *heved* had lasted four long centuries, the Israelites would have picked up and left early on. Instead, they seem to have found it quite

comfortable in Egypt, especially Goshen. It was by the Nile River and close to the Mediterranean Sea for trade as well as entry into what's now the Middle East and beyond.

“This day you are to go forth, in the month of Abib” [vs. 4]. A short but important verse as the actual date of departing Egypt, the first time this month is given, and occurs four other times in Exodus with one other reference in Deuteronomy. *ʿAvyv* means “new barley” and corresponds to our month of April or the springtime when first crops were coming in. Implied here is that the Israelites, having just celebrated the Passover, were still uncertain as to the next step, they being in the midst of a country that had just lost its entire first born. “Are to go forth” suggests this waiting, that it was not necessarily the following day. In other words, the Israelites were awaiting their marching orders (literally). It should be noted that many of the earlier plagues had destroyed so many animals and crops but not so for the Israelites. They, not the Egyptians, were unaffected, which gave them the advantage of determining the exact time to leave. Besides, the Lord must have taken into consideration violent reaction to the death of Egypt's first born, an outrage against Israel that was sure to follow.

“And when the Lord brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.” Thus begins the first part of vs. 5 which mirrors 3.8 when the Lord first spoke with Moses from the burning bush. Besides, both verses bear a striking resemblance to the promises made to Abraham as in 15.18 when he mentioned these tribes among others: “To your descendants I give this land.” Thus the Israelites are presented with the same promise as Abraham. Chances are the original promise had been kept alive orally in Egypt during the Israelites' four hundred year sojourn. They must have pondered it deeply and wondered how it applied to them in what seems to have been a fairly stable, peaceful existence until there arose the Pharaoh who put them under forced labor. Those peaceful years lulled the Israelites to sleep as to their eventual future. Actually it is quite amazing that the people had stayed together for so long. Early on in the Book of Exodus the Israelites are presented as a more or less unified group distinct from the Egyptians (and others) among whom they were living which meant they had retained their identity reasonably intact for such a long time. Thus they were in a double-bind: the secure way of life in Egypt and the tradition of their origins going back to Abraham's promise, of whether or not (or when) they would carry it through. Obviously the Canaanites and others were glad to see the Israelites depart so they could resume their old ways minus an annoying group of people in their midst bent on subduing them.

Vs. 5 begins with “and when” meaning that the departure from Egypt is a given fact but built and expanded upon the original call of Abraham with “you shall keep this service in this month.” The sole purpose for leaving Egypt is to carry out “this service” or *havodah* as in 12.26 (“What do you mean by this service?”) even if the intended place is one “flowing with milk and honey.” Note that the verb “shall keep” is *havad* or to do compared with *hasah*, literally, “to do” the Pasch as in 12.48 and *shamar* in 12.47. In sum, Israel is bidden not so much to take over Canaan (that's involved, of course) but to be faithful in the *havad*

of the *havodah*. This new *havodah* is certainly more attractive than the one imposed by the Egyptians in 1.14: “and made their lives bitter with bitter *havodah*.” Then again, the Israelites may have thought that yes, we have experienced bitter *havodah* to date, but the current Pharaoh can’t remain in power much longer after his first born son had been slain by the Lord. It might be better to wait and see if things will return to normal as they had been for over four hundred years.

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord” [vs. 6]. There seems a contradiction here, eating unleavened or unraised bread for seven days with a feast on the seventh day. However, the seven days at hand differ from the “seventh day” by reason of it being designated as “day seven,” reminiscent of that day when the Lord had rested from his creation. As for the number seven, it is *shevah*, from the verbal root *shavah* meaning to swear an oath. “He swore to your fathers” [vs. 5]. Thus day *shevah* is day *shavah* or day-of-the-oath. Thus day *shavah* is one of a feast or *chag* as in 12.14: “This day (Passover) shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord.” The stricture against unleavened bread—flat bread, if you will—is continued in vs. 7, part of which runs “and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory.” *Gevul* is the noun for “territory” as last noted in 10.14 and refers more to borders compared with the country itself though that is implied. Thus no unleavened bread is to be found with Israel’s borders. So when future generations have settled down in Canaan and have made it their own, they will continue to comport themselves at Passover as on the move and in haste. They may have a permanent home but not so as far as God is concerned. The beauty of about this focus upon haste is that it transcends whether Israel has a home or not or whether its home remains or is destroyed. The Passover will be celebrated to the full, hence the beauty of these divine injunctions.

“And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth” [vs. 9]. Here “sign” or *’oth* (first mentioned in 3.11) is equivalent to “it” or “this day” of vs. 3 as well as “day seven” of vs. 6. With regard to the designation of time noted above as based upon the seven days of creation in Genesis (i.e., ‘day one,’ day two,’ etc.), this *’oth* serves to bring home the immediacy of the day’s significance which is why it will be etched, if you will, on one’s hand. The precise nature of this etching isn’t spelled out in the text and can mean a tattoo, bracelet or a physical mark. What is clear, however, is the existence of a direct correlation between the *’oth* and the doing of it, hand being the operative agent. Apparently the *’oth* is never removed from one’s hand. The same applies to one’s eyes in vs. 9 which means the faculty of vision: “as a memorial between your eyes,” *zikaron* being the word for “memorial:” “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord” [12.14]. Just as the *’oth* or sign is inscribed or placed on one’s hand, so the *zikaron* is put in between one’s eyes...a third awakened eye, if you will. Thus the faculty of vision is transformed to the faculty of memory which is more at home determining time as in the Genesis fashion of day one, etc. In other words, *zikaron* relative to the Passover is more important than what one sees. Both *’oth* and *zikaron* (sign and memorial) are geared for one purpose which completes vs. 9:

“that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt.” This law or Torah as it later came to be known had not yet been given to Moses though it has been mentioned several times already. Implied is that the special time of “this day” and “day seven” is involved; Torah, once it attains fulness from the hand of Moses, will contain everything necessary for becoming aware of this new mode of time. Torah is to be in one’s mouth as something uttered. Even more fundamental is that Torah is to be at the root of all one’s thoughts which assume oral expression. The concluding words of vs. 9 refer to the Lord’s “strong hand” and is the reason why *’oth* or sign is associated with the hand of a person.

“And you shall therefore keep this ordinance at its appointed time from year to year” [vs. 10]. Though the Israelites in Egypt must have been familiar with the new type of telling time based upon the seven days of Genesis, here it is put into the wholly new context of the Passover. “From year to year” in essence means forever or refers to the passage of conventional time. Insertion of the new type of time (‘day seven,’ for example) into this linear time means that it is transformed from an experience of *chronos* into *kairos* or from mindless passage of time to an event that grabs your attention. Liturgically speaking, the former consists of just seven special days out of the entire year. At the Lord’s request, Moses puts this observance of special time in terms of an “ordinance” or *chuqah* as in 12.17 which is to be kept or *shamar*, this verb now being focused upon that one week period as opposed to the rest of the year.

Vs. 11 repeats more or less vs. 5: when the Lord “brings you into the land of the Canaanites” after which he “shall give it to you.” In other words, we have a two-fold action about to unfold: the bringing out of Egypt by the Lord followed by his giving Canaan to the Israelites. The latter is familiar but the second has yet to be revealed. Perhaps the Israelites thought Moses would continue leading them in Canaan, having no idea that they’d be wandering in the desert for forty years. Since he had come through for them time after time, especially dealing with Pharaoh, the mightiest man on earth, surely he will do so again. One clue as to this future giving of Canaan to Israel is that “you shall set apart to the Lord all that first opens the womb” [vs. 12]. As for the verb at hand, the Hebrew text has two words: the verb *havah* (to make, to do) noted several times earlier plus the noun *peter* meaning a fissure or that which cleaves or breaks forth. Five other references are found in Exodus with three elsewhere. One of the others verses is Num 3.12: “I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every first born that opens the womb among the people of Israel.” Thus *peter* has the sense of an infant breaking forth from the womb for the very first time. The same sense of uniqueness applies to the Israelites’ cattle only, no other beasts.

A provision for safeguarding the prerogative of the first born is given in vs. 13 where a human *peter* is redeemed by an animal instead of a human (sacrifice), *padah* being the verb, to loose or set free. “And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities” [Ps 130.8]. As for the moral character of a first born, in the case at hand it seems to take second place to the importance of priority at birth. Perhaps much of this has to do with infant mortality as

noted earlier including the miracle of a child being born for the first time after which the mystery is diminished. As for the *padah* at hand, the ritual is given but the occasion isn't spelled out; that will become clearer with time in the desert. Obviously children will inquire as to this *padah*: "What does this mean?...By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt from the house of bondage" [vs. 14]. As for "time to come" which opens this verse, the word is *machar*, often as "tomorrow" or in reference to some future time which here intimates as long as Israel exists as a people. The asking of this question and the response can be taken as an antidote to ignorance but more than that, remembrance of leaving Egypt in the form of a ritual. Vss. 15-16 spell out this departure, of Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to let Israel leave Egypt (note that vs. 15 includes cattle, again of all the animals belonging to the Israelites). The same verse speaks of the Lord sacrificing "all the males that first open (*peter*) the womb," *zavach* being the verb for "sacrifice" as in 3.18: "that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God." *Zavach* applies to the slaughter of animals; in addition to an offering of males on an altar, it is sharing in something akin to Abraham's offering of his son Isaac which an angel of the Lord prevented at the last minute. Certainly that dramatic story was familiar to the Israelites during their lengthy sojourn in Egypt. Note that *zavach* applies to "all the males that open the womb" whereas "the first born of my sons I redeem." The same category (first born) is dealt with but here in terms to both *zavach* and *padah* (redeem). *Padah* throws into better relief the notion of *zavach* or sacrifice, that the two apply with equal force.

Moses' final words to the people which began in vs. 3 conclude with an echo of vs. 9 (sign and memorial, *'oth* and *zikaron*): "It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes." Here *'oth* is identified as "mark" instead of sign, the term used several times earlier, especially vs. 9 ('a sign on your hand'). Both uses of *'oth* seem to be the same for hands but instead of *zikaron* (memorial), we have "frontlets" or *totaphoth* which are bands later used by Jews at prayer. Two other references are found, both in Deuteronomy (6.8 and 11.8), and are the same, the former being quoted here: "And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes." Finally vs. 16 concludes the address by Moses with "for by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt," and that hand was the archetype, if you will, of the human hands with a mark or *'oth*.

Vss. 17-22 or to the end of Chapter Thirteen are not words of Moses but a prelude of sorts before the important act of Israel's deliverance in the next chapter. Though the people were ignorant of this, Moses knew full well in advance but didn't disclose it else he would have a rebellion on his hands as well as vengeance from the Egyptians. "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near." The direct route would have been from Goshen where the Israelites had been assembled, across the Red Sea, skirting the northern part of Sinai and right into Canaan...not more than a week's march. Besides, that was the most popular trade route between Egypt, Africa, the Middle East and beyond. The Lord was sensitive to the attachment Israel had acquired toward Egypt, especially when confronted with armed response to their entry into Canaan. He was afraid the Israelites would "repent" or *nacham*

which means to lament, gloat or take vengeance. “Obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent of the evil which he has pronounced against you” [Jer 26.13]. If that should happen, Israel would face even stiffer servitude, even annihilation, upon their return to Egypt and lose divine favor. Instead of this quick transit the Lord “led the people round by way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea” [vs. 18]. That is, they headed south of the traditional route which must have made them wonder what was going on.

Obviously there was no land bridge to Sinai, so they figured some type of divine intervention had to take place. Perhaps some thought this was a good alternative because it avoided the heavily trafficked route into Canaan and would preclude inviting suspicion. To get in that vicinity, chances are the people took boats up the Nile River. As for this leading by the Lord (*nachah*: ‘The Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen,’ Gen 24.27), nothing is said explicitly about it though Moses is presumed to play an important role. Therefore he must have a certain sensitivity to the Lord as to this *nachah* so as not to deviate from the path. This is desert region he is passing through; one misstep and everything is lost. Apparently the people went along with this alternate plan, for vs. 18 continues with “And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.” This was noted earlier in different terms: “And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.” The words “equipped for battle” is one in Hebrew, *chamushym*, an adjective in the plural with just three other references one of them being Jos 1.14: “but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brethren and shall help them.” As for the meaning of *chamushym*, it translates as something like “by five in a rank,” *chamesh* being the number five.

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him” [vs. 19], words which harken back to the conclusion of Genesis: “Then Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel saying, ‘God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here’” [50.25-6]. Memory of this oath seems to have remained very strong through Israel’s four centuries in Egypt, forming part of their oral heritage. As for the “visit” by God, the verb is *paqad* noted in 4.31: “that the Lord had visited the people of Israel.” Joseph gave no indication of when this *paqad* was to happen, just that it was promised. He was confident that it would happen which is why he ordered his bones to be transported from Egypt. Despite the generosity by Pharaoh and the people, Joseph knew Egypt was not his homeland. Surely he kept under close wraps that order to transport his bones, for in the eyes of the Egyptians Joseph had become legendary for having become their savior during the seven year famine. Nothing is said as to the location of Joseph’s remains in Egypt, most likely in Goshen, where some type of shrine must have been erected. Later when the Holy Family fled King Herod, it is likely they headed for this shrine. Joseph must have prayed here asking guidance from his predecessor by the same name...one dreamer consulting another dreamer.

As for the remaining verses of Chapter Thirteen, they recount the first movements of Israel with the Lord going before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night (vss. 21-2) as echoed in 14.19. *Hamud* is the word for “pillar” which later will play an important

role in the construction of the ark. Most likely the Israelites took their recollection of this divine *hamud* for incorporation into the ark's support later in Exodus. After all, *hamud* had a precedence in the number of pillars (*matsevah*; implies a memorial) set up by the patriarchs in Canaan. Since two pillars are presented, one of cloud (day) and one of fire (night), it appears that one pillar existed which changed during the morning and evening twilight hours instead of one pillar replacing the other. That's another reason why the Israelites later were especially sensitive to the Sabbath commencing at first twilight, watching for the evening star as a sign of passage into Sabbath. This *hamud* was stationary as far as its relationship with Israel, for it "did not depart from before the people" [vs. 22]. The verb for "depart" is *mush* which connotes a withdrawing. "Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tent" [33.11]. How far was this stationary pillar, no one knows for sure, but it must have been distant enough for all to behold. The same applies to its height: probably just high enough to be seen in the fairly level terrain of the desert. The Israelites were accustomed to pillars in the lavish buildings of Egypt, so that would have offered a good analogy for the divine pillar at hand. The pillar by day might have been relatively harmless to look at, but when it changed into one of fire at night, it must have made the Israelites somewhat fearful. Regardless, the Lord himself was in the pillar (cf. vs. 21), concealed there as he would later in the ark and Jerusalem temple.