



Das zweite Buch Mose





***The Book of Exodus***  
***The Consecration of God's Covenant People***

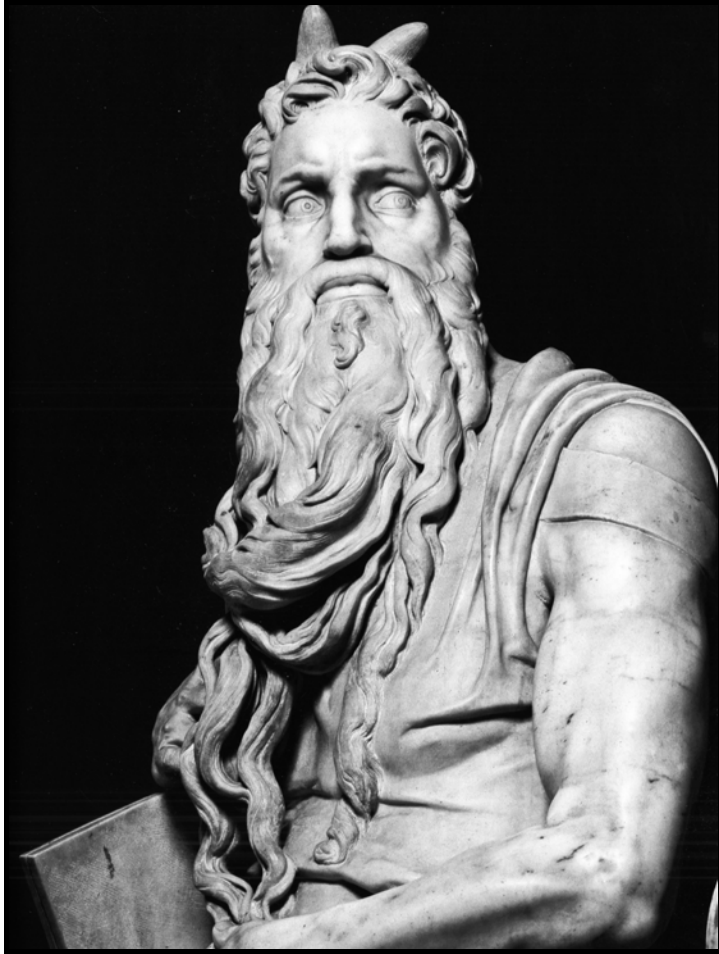
***Our Savior Lutheran Church***  
***Houston, Texas***  
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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## The Name of the Book

Exodus is the second of five segments of the Hebrew “*Torah*,” the Law of Moses. Thus, the Torah is identified as the “*Pentateuch*” (“*Five Books*”) in the Greek



*“The Prophet Moses” by Michelangelo*

Septuagint. The books of the Hebrew Bible were named by the opening words of the of the text. Accordingly, Exodus was called “*Shemoth*” - “*the names of*” from Exodus 1:1 - “***These are the names of the sons of Israel...***” The Septuagint designated the book with the Greek word “*exodos*” (“*to go out*”) in terms of one of its major events, the deliverance and departure of the Children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The Latin Vulgate followed this precedent with the title “*Exodus*” which has remained in modern Bible translations. In Luther’s German Bible translation Exodus was designated as “*Das Zweite Buch Mose*” (“*The Second Book of Moses*”).

## The Author of the Book

The Mosaic authorship of Exodus and the remainder of the Pentateuch remained unchallenged within both Judaism and Christianity until the modern era. This view is strongly supported by the Biblical text itself which repeatedly affirms that Moses was commanded by God to provide a written record of that which was revealed to him and the great events in which he was called to play a role:

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to***

*be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely erase the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven.”*  
(Exodus 17:14)

*“Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel...Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, ‘We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.’”*  
(Exodus 24:4,7)

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’ Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant - the Ten Commandments.”* (Exodus 34:27-28)

*“Here are the stages of the journey of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt by divisions under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. At the Lord’s command, Moses recorded the stages in their journey.”*  
(Numbers 33:1-2)

*“So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them, “At the end of every seven years, at the year for cancelling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people, men, women and children, and aliens living in your towns - so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”*  
(Deuteronomy 31:9-13)

References to the Torah as “**Law of Moses**” occur regularly throughout the entire Old Testament (i.e. Joshua 1:7-8; 8:31-32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Kings 21:8; Ezra



*“The Testament of Moses” by Luca Signorelli*

6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:11-13; Malachi 4:4). Christ and His apostles consistently continue this pattern in the New Testament as in dozens of instances they refer to the Pentateuch as the **“Law of Moses.”** So Jesus denounced His Jewish opponents for their failure to heed the writings of Moses whom they proudly claimed to be their father: **“Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?”** (John 5:46-47; cf. also Matthew 19:8; John 7:19; Acts 3:22; Romans 10:5)

It is plain to see that the so-called *“Documentary Hypothesis”* of contemporary scholarship which arrogantly dismisses the Biblical witness and attributes the authorship of the five books of Moses to a composite of imaginary sources (*“J-E-P-D”*), is clearly contrary to the testimony of the Word of God.

### Central Theme and Outline

The central theme of the Book of Exodus is the consecration of the people of Israel as God's covenant nation. Ernst Wendland offers this basic outline of the book:

*“Jehovah's Covenant With the People of Israel*

*I. The Deliverance of the Covenant People Out of Egypt (Chapters 1-18)*

*II. The Establishment of Jehovah's Covenant with Israel (Chapters 19-24)*

*III. The Entry Into the Place of the Covenant - The Tabernacle (Chapters 25-40)”*

(Wendland, p. 4)

The covenant upon which God's relationship with Israel is founded originated in God's messianic promises to the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 12). His descendants are now set apart as a distinct nation who will preserve God's promise of salvation for all of humanity. Gleason L. Archer Jr. summarizes the content of the Book of Exodus around the same basic theme:

*“The theme of the book is the commencement of Israel as a covenant nation. It relates how God fulfilled His ancient promise to Abraham by multiplying his descendants into a great nation, redeeming them from the land of bondage, and renewing the covenant of grace with them on a national basis. At the foot of the holy mountain He bestows on them the promises of the covenant, and provides them with the rule of conduct by which they may lead a holy life, and also with a sanctuary in which they may make offerings for sin and renew fellowship with Him of the basis of forgiving grace.”* (Archer, p. 209)

In his magnificent *“Prefaces to the Old Testament”* Martin Luther describes the messianic nature of the Old Testament text as *“the swaddling cloths and the manger in which Christ lies:”*

*“Therefore dismiss your own opinions and feelings, and think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines which can never be sufficiently explored, in order that you may find that divine wisdom which God here lays before you in such simple guise as to quench all pride. Here you will find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds (Luke 2:12). Simple and lowly are these swaddling cloths, but dear is the treasure, Christ, who lies in them.”* (Luther, AE 35, p. 236)



Luther contends that the faith of the Old Testament believers was that same as that of Christians in the New Testament era: “*Similarly, in the Old Testament too there are,*



**“Martin Luther in the Robes of a Doctor of Theology”  
by Lucas Cranach**

*besides the laws, certain promises and words of grace, by which the holy fathers and prophets under the law were kept, like us, in the faith of Christ.”*(Luther, AE 35, p. 237) Luther sums up the content of the Book of Exodus in this way:

*“Afterward, in the second book (Exodus), when the world was now full and sunk in blindness so that men scarcely knew any longer what sin was or where death came from, God brings Moses forward with the law and selects a special people, in order to enlighten the world again through them, and by the law to reveal sin anew. He therefore organizes this people with all kinds of laws and separates it from all other peoples. He has them build a tent, a begins a form of worship. He appoints princes and officials, and provides His people splendidly with both laws and men, to rule them*

*both in body before the world and in the spirit before God.”* (Luther, AE 35, p. 237)

A more detailed outline of the Book of Exodus, structured around the themes of Law and Gospel, could look like this:

## ***Outline of the Book of Exodus***

- I. The Hebrews in Bondage and the Call of God's Deliverer (1:1-4:31)
  - A. Preliminary Genealogy (1:1-6)
  - B. The Bondage in Egypt (1:7-22)
  - C. The Childhood of Moses (2:1-14)
  - D. Moses' Character Disciplined, the Second 40 Years (2:15-25)
  - E. The Call of Moses (3:1-4:31)
  
- II. Triumphant Grace - The Deliverance of Israel from Bondage (5:1-18:27)
  - A. The Plagues of Egypt (8:1-11:10)
  - B. Institution of the Passover ((12:1-28, 43-50)
  - C. The Final Plague and Withdrawal from Egypt (12:29-42,51)
  - D. Ordinances Concerning the First Born and Unleavened Bread (13:1-16)
  - E. Preparation for the Departure from Egypt (13:17-22)
  - F. The Crossing of the Red Sea (14:1-31)
  - G. The Song of Moses to Israel (15:1-21)
  - H. The Wilderness of Shur (15:22-27)
  - I. The Wilderness of Sin (16:1-33)
  - J. The Water From the Rock (17:1-7)
  - K. Events at Rephidim (17:8-16)
  - L. Jethro and Moses (18:1-27)
  
- III. The Seal of Holiness (19:1-31:18)
  - A. The Covenant Promise - Absolute Submission to God's Revealed Will as a Holy Nation, a Peculiar People ( (19:1-25)
  - B. The Ten Commandments - Basic Principles of a Holy Life Under the Covenant (20:1-17)
  - C. The Covenant Code (20:22-23:33)
  - D. Ratification of the Covenant (24:1-8)
  - E. Moses Returns to Mt. Sinai (24:9-18)
  - F. The Design of the Tabernacle (25:1-27:21)
  - G. The Ministry and Ritual of the Tabernacle (28:1-31:11,18)
  
- IV. The Apostasy of the Golden Calf (32:1-33:23)
  - A. The Golden Calf (32:1-35)
  - B. Repentance and Intercession by Moses (33:1-23)
  
- V. Reaffirmation of the Covenant and Establishment of Old Testament Means of

Grace (34:1-40:38)

- A. Restatement of the Covenant (34:1-35)
- B. The Establishment of the Sabbath and the Tabernacle (35:1-19)
- C. The Offerings for the Tabernacle (35:4-36:38)
- D. Construction of the Ark and the Furnishings of the Tabernacle (37:1-38:31)
- E. Preparation of the Priestly Vestments (39:1-43)
- F. The Building of the Tabernacle (40:1-33)
- G. The Appearance of the Shekinah Over the Tabernacle (40:34-38)



*“Exodus Title Page from a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible*



*“Jacob Blessing His Sons” - by T. Dalziel*

## *The Preliminary Genealogy*

### *Exodus 1:1-6*

*These are the names of the sons of Israel who enter Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt. Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.*

*“These are the names of the sons of Israel...”* - The opening words of the Book of Exodus mark the transition from the narrative of Genesis and serves to link the two books together. The Hebrew text actually begins with the conjunction “and” which reflects the reality that the separation of Exodus from Genesis was an arbitrary division which was not present in the original text. The conjunction was omitted in

the Greek Septuagint and is absent in most English translations. Commentator John Durham criticizes this omission: “*Though many modern translators follow the lead of LXX in omitting this copula, to do so is a mistake. The connection of the text of Exodus, with what has preceded it must be emphasized, not further obscured.*” (Durham, p. 4) Verses 1-5 repeat information which Genesis has already provided and are, in fact, an exact quotation of Genesis 46:8. This deliberate repetition also serves to connect the events which follow to that which has gone before.

The twelve sons are listed according to their birth mothers in three distinct series. The first four sons of Leah, Jacob’s chief wife, head the list. The enumeration of the of the twelve sons by name recalls both the circumstances of their birth and Jacob’s observations about the significance of their names at the time of his final blessings (cf. Genesis 49:1-28). The first group includes “**Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.**” “**Reuben**” is a combination of Hebrew words which mean “*to see*” and “*a son*” because his mother believed that the birth of this son was the result of God having seen her misery and would cause Jacob her husband to take notice of her again (cf. Genesis 29:32). Jacob later hailed his firstborn as “***the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.***” (Genesis 49:3). The name “**Simeon**” is



“*Jacob’s Final Moments*” by James Tissot



*“Judah” by James Tissot*

based on the Hebrew verb “to hear.” Leah chose the name to acknowledge that the birth of this child meant that the Lord had heard her prayers: **“Because the Lord heard that I am not loved He gave me this one too.”** (Genesis 29:33) The etymology of the name **“Levi”** is derived from the verb “to be joined together,” the expression of Leah’s forlorn hope that Jacob would now become attached to her because she had given him three sons (Genesis 29:34). **“Judah”** is the final name in this foursome. It is a form of the verb “to give thanks” or “to praise.” When he was born Leah declared: **“This time I will praise the Lord,’ so she named him Judah.”** (Genesis 29:35) Jacob alluded to the meaning of his son’s name when he prophesied: **“Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you.”** (Genesis 49:8)

With the birth of this fourth son, there was a pause in Leah’s childbearing (Genesis 29:35).

The list of **“the sons of Israel”** (Exodus 1:1) reflects that pause as it proceeds to the second cluster of Jacob’s sons. The second series begins with the names of the two sons to which Leah gave birth after the temporary interruption of her fertility. First is **“Issachar,”** a name derived from the word for a “reward” or a “gift.” His mother explained the name in this way: **“Then Leah said, ‘God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband.’ So she named him Issachar.”** (Genesis 30:18) **“Zebulon”** was the sixth of Leah’s sons. Upon his birth his mother rejoiced: **“God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons.”** (Genesis 30:20) **“Zebulon”** means “honor” or “exalt.” The second grouping also includes **“Benjamin,”** the son whom God gave to Rachel and Jacob as a replacement for Joseph. Joseph is omitted from the list here because, having already been in Egypt, he was not among **“the sons of Israel who entered Egypt with Jacob, each with his family.”** **“Benjamin”** means



*“the son at my right hand,”* reflecting the boy’s favored status with Jacob as Joseph’s replacement (Genesis 35:18).

During the rivalry between Leah and Rachel, each foisted upon their hapless husband handmaidens to serve as their fertility surrogates (Genesis 30:1-13). The sons produced by these unions are listed in the third and final category. First **“Dan”** and **“Naphthali,”** the sons of Rachel’s handmaiden Bilhah. **“Dan”** means **“he has vindicated,”** from Rachel’s happy assertion: **“God has listened to me. He has vindicated me and given me a son.”** (Genesis 30:6) Jacob later reflects the origin of Dan’s name when he prophesies: **“Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.”** (Genesis 49:16) **“Naphthali”** literally means **“my struggle.”** Rachel chose this name in reference to her ongoing struggle with her sister for their husband’s affection: **“I have had a great struggle with my sister and I have won.’ So she named him Naphthali.”** (Genesis 30:8) **“Gad”** and **“Asher,”** the final pair of names on the list, are the two sons produced by Leah’s servant Zilpah. **“Gad”** is derived from the word for **“good fortune,”** the term which Leah used to celebrate his birth (Genesis 30:11). **“Asher”** means **“happy,”** a description of his legal mother’s response to his arrival in the birth competition: **“How happy I am! The women will call me happy!’ So she named him Asher.”** (Genesis 30:13)

The listing of the tribal patriarchs by name in Exodus 1 serves both as a reminder of the colorful history of their origin in Jacob’s troubled household and as a foreshadowing of the rivalries which will come into play among the tribes which will descend from them as the Israelite nation comes into being in the



*“Gad” by James Tissot*



*“The Reunion of Jacob and Joseph in Egypt” by Schopin*

generations to follow.

***“The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all.”*** - The enumeration of the household of Jacob as ***“seventy”*** concurs with the previous numbering of Genesis 46:27 - ***“With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob’s family which went to Egypt were seventy in all.”*** The same figure recurs in Deuteronomy 10:22 - ***“Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.”*** Bible critics are quick to point out that in his speech before the Jewish Sanhedrin, Stephen would later use the slightly different number seventy-five: ***“After this Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all.”*** (Acts 7:14) The apparent discrepancy is resolved by a comparison of the Greek Septuagint text of Genesis 46:20 which adds the names of Joseph’s two grandsons and three great grandsons to its reckoning, thus arriving at the larger number. Stephen’s number includes the additional descendants of Joseph. Bible scholar U. Cassuto of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem suggests that the number seventy here resonates

from two previous turning points in the history of humanity.

*“The tradition of the Israelites refers to the seventy descendants of Noah...and just as the nations of the entire world number seventy according to Genesis X, so the children of Israel number seventy; they form a small world that parallels the great world, a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm.” (Cassuto, p. 8)*

Thus the fact that Jacob’s family numbered seventy is one more signal that a new beginning for humanity is about to occur. As the sons of Noah had multiplied from a mere seventy to fill the whole earth, so the sons of Jacob would multiply from seventy to fill the land of Egypt and become a great nation in their own right.



*“Joseph Presents His Father Jacob to Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot*

**“Joseph was already in Egypt.”** - Joseph, the elder son of Rachel and Jacob’s favorite son, is listed separately at the end in a position of special prominence. The manner in which God had used Joseph’s sale into slavery by his jealous brothers and his rise to prominence in the court of the Egyptian Pharaoh to accomplish His divine purpose is a major theme of the final portion of the Book of Genesis. That theme



now carries over into the Book of Exodus.

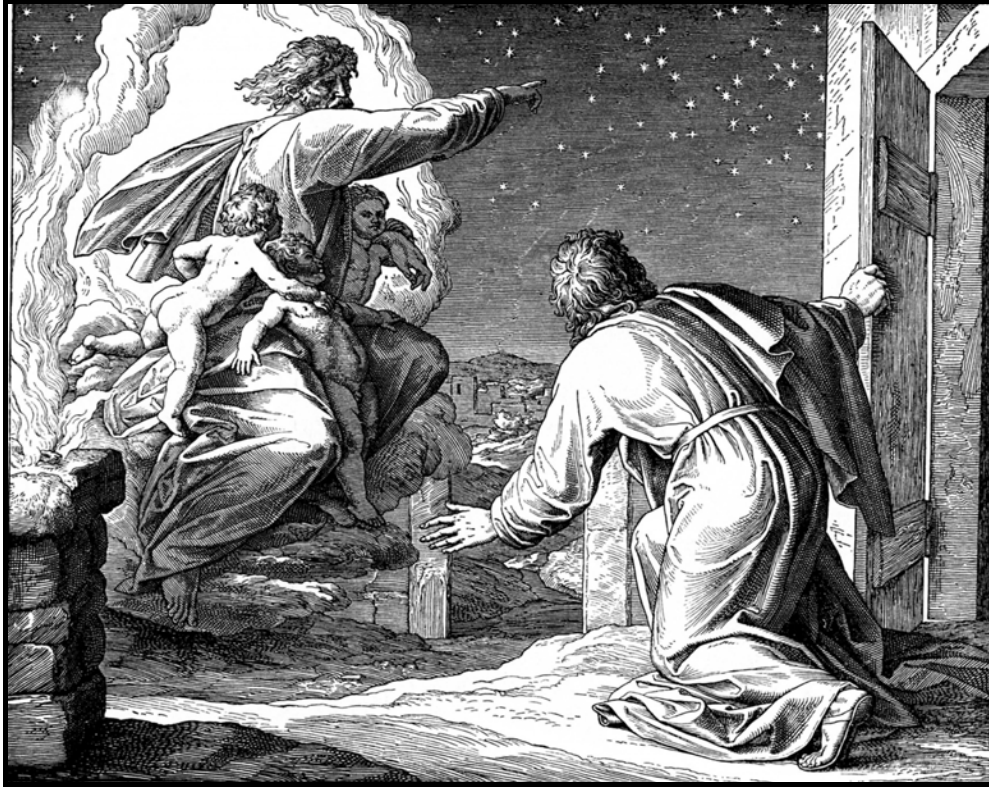
***“Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died...”*** - The transition from the closing scenes of Genesis to the beginning of the Exodus account is completed with the observation that the generation of all those who had come to Egypt with Jacob and his sons had died. And yet, despite the deaths of all of the founding fathers, the nation of Israel did not disappear or diminish. In fact, within the plan and purpose of God, the people flourished and grew.

***“But the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly***



***“The Return of Jacob’s Body to Canaan for Burial” (Genesis 50:1-14) by James Tissot***

***numerous, so that the land was filled with them.***” U. Cassuto summarizes the sense of the text in this way: *“In the course of time, in the tranquil period of which the Bible does not speak in detail, behind the enveloping mist that conceals the history of the passing generations, the family, by Divine grace, grew larger and spread abroad.”* (Cassuto, p.8) From the seventy souls that had come down into Egypt a



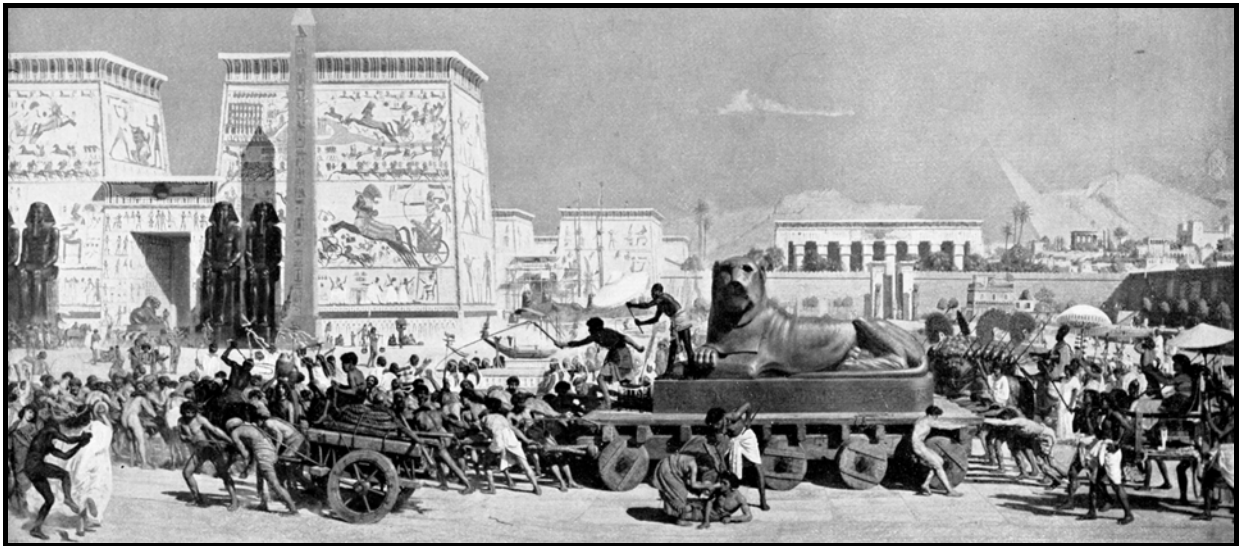
*“God’s Promise to Abraham” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

mighty nation had grown. Commentator John Durham aptly refers to this verse as *“the awed, almost incredulous description of the unusual multiplication of the progeny of those twelve.”* (Durham, p. 5) The emphatic, repetitive language of the text serves to emphasize the supernatural nature of this growth. The original text utilizes a series of seven phrases to describe the phenomenon: (1) *“were fruitful;”* (2) *“and teemed;”* (3) *“and multiplied;”* (4) *“and grew mighty;”* (5) *“with strength;”* (6) *“strongly;”* (7) *“so that the land was filled with them.”* The deliberate use of the perfect number seven in the structure of the verse again stresses the primary role of God in this miraculous expansion. The terminology here reflects God’s original command to Adam in Genesis 1:28 - ***“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.’”*** The same words had been repeated in God’s command to Noah in the aftermath of the Flood: ***“As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”*** (Genesis 9:7) In this way the promises which the Lord had made to childless Abraham were fulfilled:

***“I will confirm My covenant between Me and you and will greatly***

*increase your numbers.’ Abram fell face down and God said to him, ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations...I will make you very fruitful. I will make nations of you and kings will come from you.’” (Genesis 17:2-5)*

The “*land*” which was filled with the teeming population of the Israelites was the “*region of Goshen*” in the northeastern corner of the Nile delta which Joseph had acquired for his family upon their arrival in Egypt (Genesis 47:27).

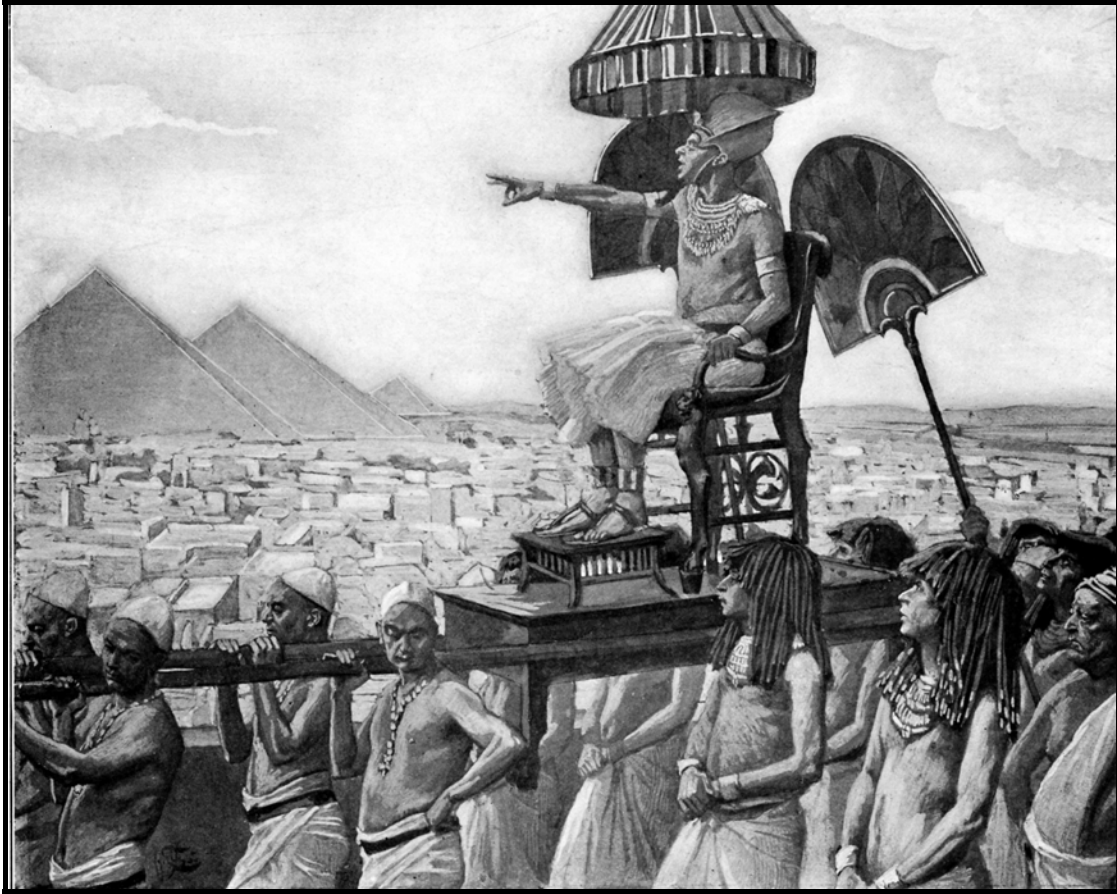


*“The Oppression of Israel in Egypt” by E. J. Poynter*

## *The Oppression of Israel in Egypt* *Exodus 1:8-14*

*Then a new king who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. “Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous, and if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.” So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.*

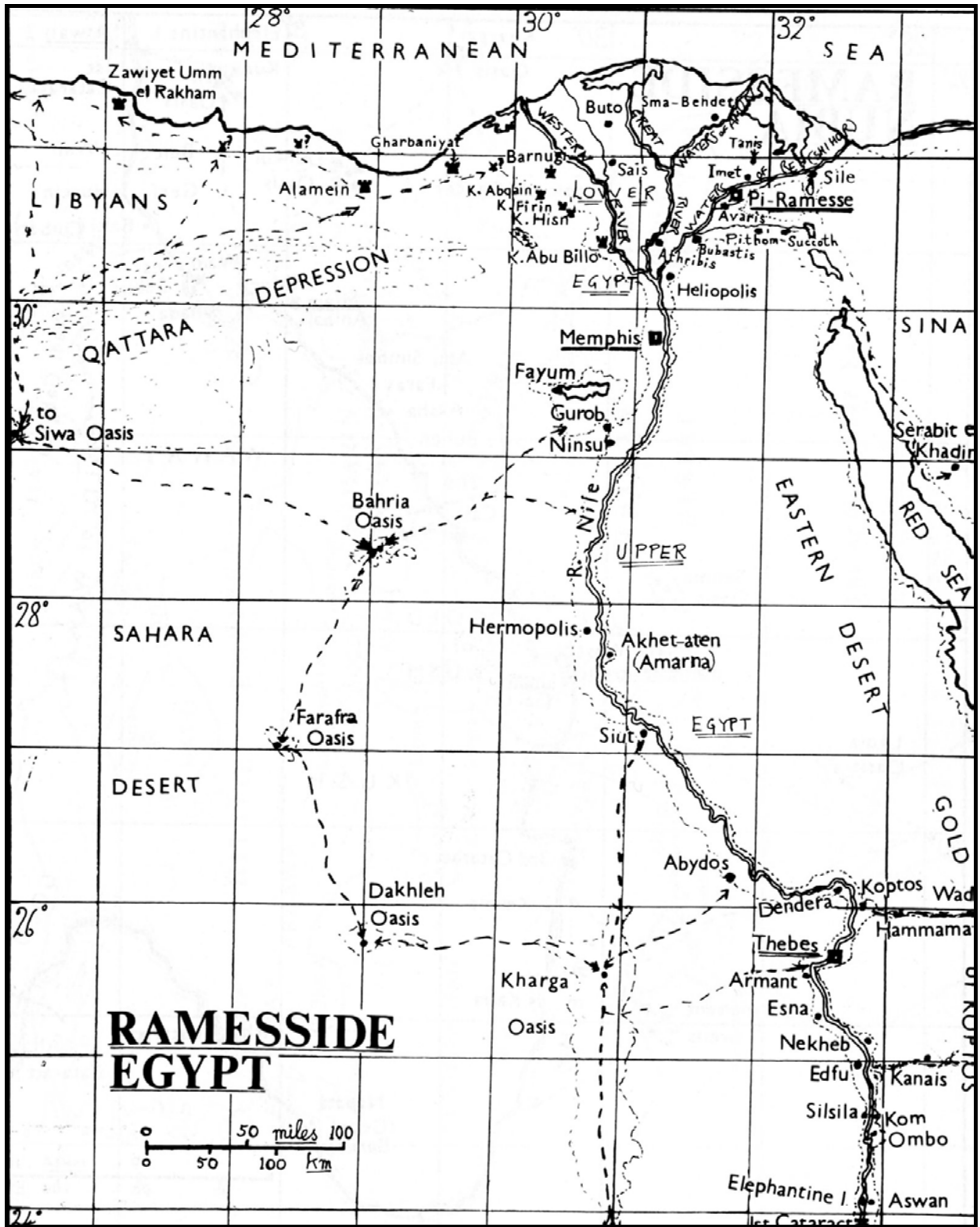




*“The New Pharaoh Notes the Importance of the Jewish People” by James Tissot*

**“Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt.”** - The sojourn of Israel in Egypt had never been envisioned as permanent. On their death beds, both Jacob and Joseph had held before the people the hope of eventual return to the land of promise in Canaan (cf. Genesis 48:21-22; 50:24). Accordingly, the Israelites made no attempt to assimilate into Egyptian society but deliberately remained a separate and distinctly different people. Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that at some point in the future serious tensions would arise between Egyptian and Israelite.

The identity of the **“new king who did not know about Joseph”** has been widely debated by historians and Bible scholars with numerous candidates put forward. The identification is complicated by the fact that Egyptian history does not mention the Israelites and Bible history does not specifically identify any of the Egyptian participants. Ancient Egypt was ruled by a long series of different royal families or dynasties. When the monarchy was passed down within the same family, ordinarily



*“Egypt During the Reign of Rameses II”*

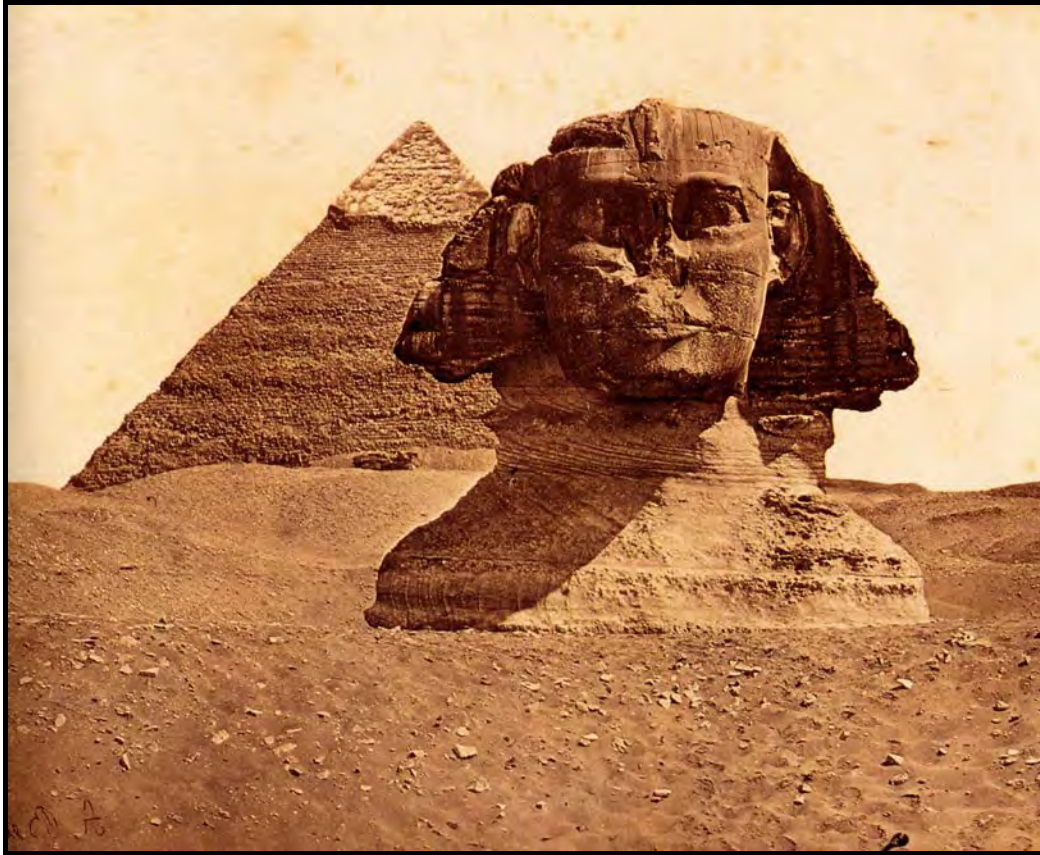
from father to son, a high degree of continuity in governmental policy was maintained. However, on those unusual occasions when one ruling family was removed from power and replaced by another, there was typically a great deal more upheaval and fundamental changes in the style and policies of the government were to be expected. Most scholars agree that the phrase *“Then a new king who did not know about Joseph came to power in Egypt”* signals not merely the accession of a new monarch but the overthrow of one dynasty and its replacement with another.

*“The writer refers to the radically changed situation, the drastic rearrangement that comes not when one king succeeds another king of the same family and with similar policies, but with the rise of a new succession of kings bringing an inevitable set of changes...This new king is the first king of a new dynasty, and thus a king who has no obligation to respect, or even to inform himself of, any commitments to a non-native group within the territory of his reign.”* (Durham, p. 7)



*Temple Relief Painting of Pharaoh Ramesses II Triumphantly Destroying His Enemies*

Egypt is among the most ancient of human civilizations, its origins reaching back to the third millennium before Christ. The Nile River, originates in the highland lakes of equatorial Africa and then flows north for 4,000 miles before it empties into the Mediterranean Sea. Carving its relentless path through mountain heights and

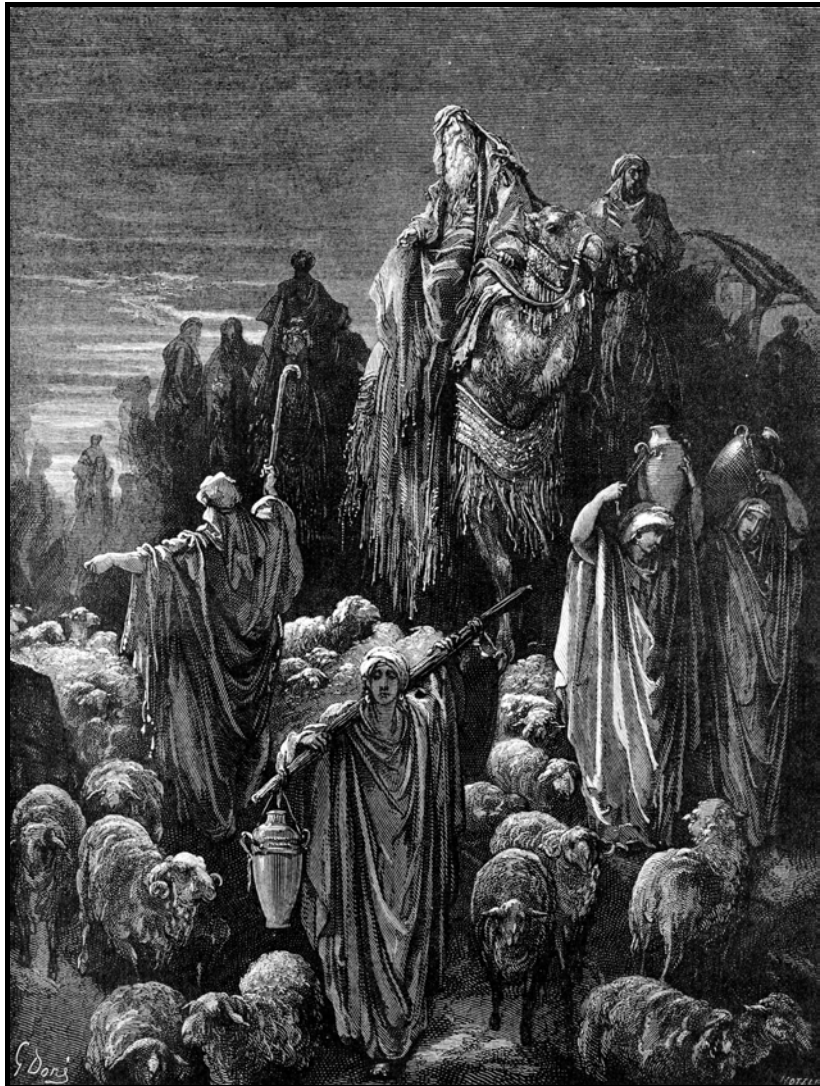


*19<sup>th</sup> Century Photograph of the Sphinx and the Great Pyramid at Giza*

sandstone ridges, the Nile thunders over six cataracts until it comes to the vast plains of the Sahara Desert. Amid the desolation of this arid land, the river's valley forms the narrow band of green abundance which is the cradle of Egyptian civilization. The classic Greek historian Herodotus rightly declared, "*Egypt is the gift of the Nile.*" The ancient Egyptians spoke of their country as the combination of the red land (the barren desert) and the black land (the verdant valley). A little over 100 miles from the sea coast, the river broadens into seven streams which spread out to form the vast marshes and fields of the Nile delta. The ancients referred to the delta as "*Lower Egypt*" in reference to its elevation, in contrast to "*Upper Egypt*," that is, the valley above the delta. The two regions were united into one kingdom under the early pharaohs who from that time forth were known as "*the Lord of the Two Lands.*" The realm into which Joseph and his family had come was already at that time an ancient land, a great world power with customs and traditions that reached back across the centuries. These relatively primitive herdsmen must have gazed upon the cities and monuments of Egypt with wonderment and awe.



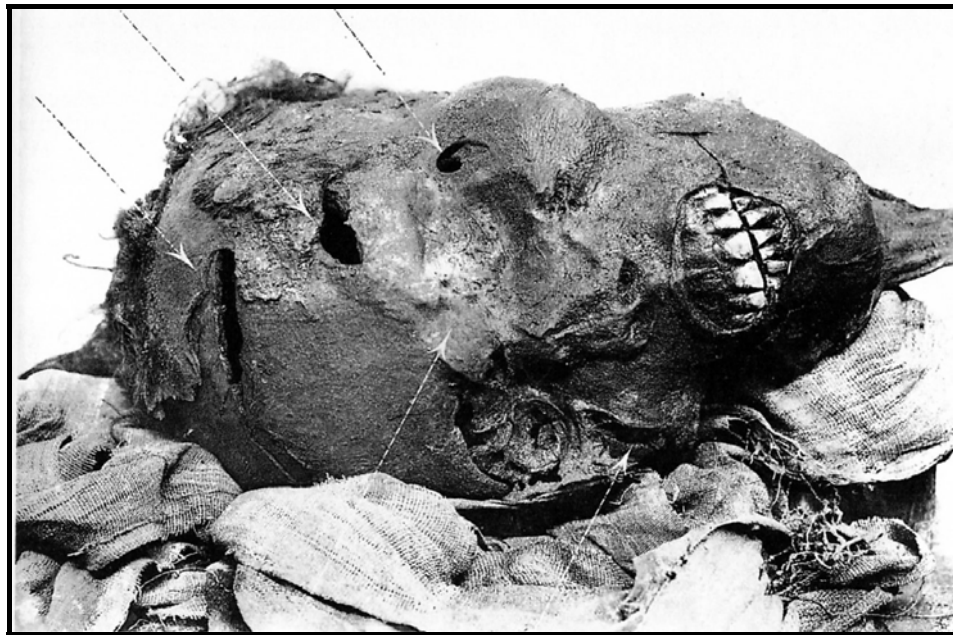
According to Biblical chronology, Jacob and his family came to Egypt about 1870 B.C. This date is based on 1Kings 6:1 which informs us that Solomon began construction of his temple in the fourth year of his reign (c. 960 B.C.) which was 480 years after the Exodus from Egypt: ***“In the four hundred and eightieth year after Israel had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the Lord.”*** Exodus 12:40 declares that the sojourn of Israel in Egypt was exactly 430 years long - ***“Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord’s divisions left Egypt.”*** The combination of those two clear Biblical assertions takes us back to 1870 B.C. as the date of Jacob’s arrival in Egypt. That means that the patriarch and his family arrived



***“Jacob Goeth Into Egypt” by Gustav Dore***

in Egypt during the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom, perhaps during the reign of Pharaoh Sesostri III who ruled as Lord of the Two Lands for thirty-eight years. Thus the Pharaoh who welcomed Joseph's father would have been a native Egyptian ruler during an era of stability and prosperity. This view is consistent with Joseph's advice that his family refrain from mentioning their occupation as shepherds ***“for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.”*** (Genesis 46: 31-34) However within a century, stability in Egypt gave way to chaos and confusion. The Kingdom fell prey to hordes of Asiatic warriors called the *“Hyksos”* (*“the rulers of foreign lands”*) or the *“Shepherd Kings”* who invaded and conquered the land, ruling from their capital city of Avaris in the north-east corner of the delta. Josephus quotes the ancient historian Manetho to describe the ferocity of the conquest:

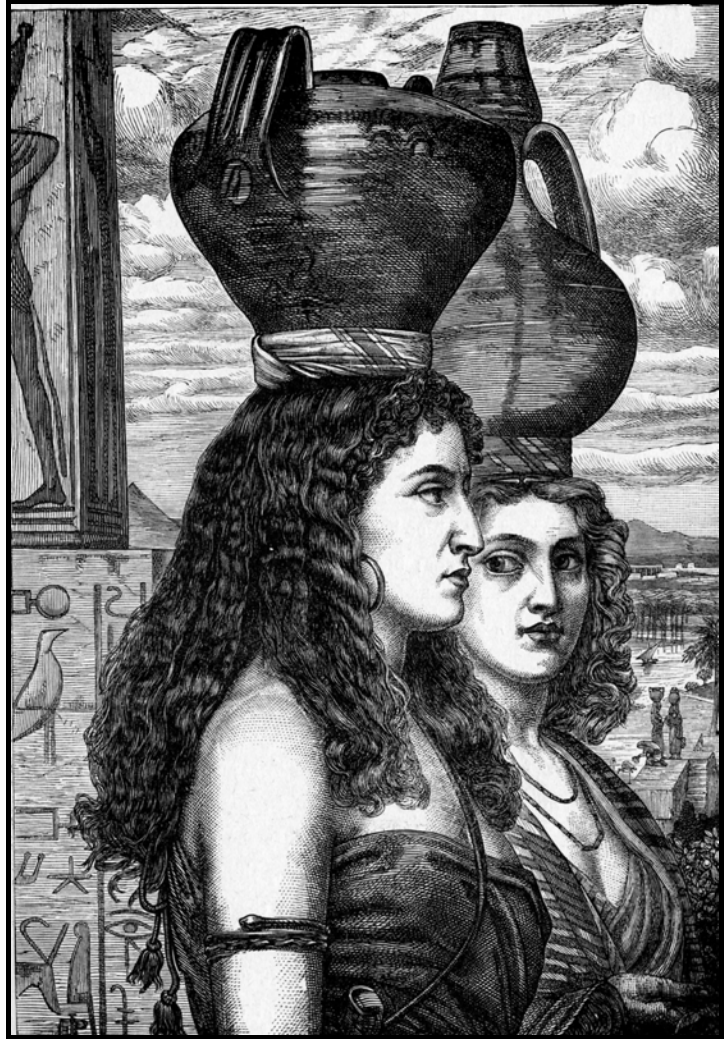
*“There was a king of ours whose name was Timaios, in whose reign it came to pass, I do not know why, that God was displeased with us and there came unexpectedly men of ignoble birth out of the eastern parts, who had boldness enough to make an expedition into our country, and easily subdued it by force without a battle. And when they had gotten our rulers under their power, they afterward savagely burned down our cities and demolished the temples of the gods, and used all of the inhabitants in a most hostile manner, for they slew some and led the children and wives of others into slavery.”* (Breasted, p. 216)



***“The Mangled Mummy of Pharaoh Seqenere Tao - Killed in Battle with the Hyksos***



Hyksos domination of Egypt continued for roughly 200 years thereafter. This era is called the Second Intermediate Period of Egyptian history. It would appear that the Hebrews, although not formally allied with the Hyksos, continued to fare well under their dominion. They had come from the same region and spoke the same type of Semitic language. The Hyksos were finally expelled by native Egyptian forces under Pharaoh Ahmose at the beginning of the New Kingdom era. In this context, it is probable that ***“the new king who did not know about Joseph”*** (Exodus 1:8), often described as ***“the pharaoh of the oppression,”*** was Ahmose I, the first ruler of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Ahmose established his royal capital in the historic Egyptian city of Thebes and battled for four years to dislodge the Hyksos from their stronghold in the delta city of Avaris and expel them from the country. When the king finally succeeded in driving them out it is understandable that he would have been profoundly concerned about a large, rapidly growing population of non-native Semites within his kingdom which had enjoyed good relations with the former government.



***“Israelite Water Carriers in Egypt”***  
***by E. J. Poynter***

***“‘Look,’ he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.’”*** (Exodus 1:9-10)



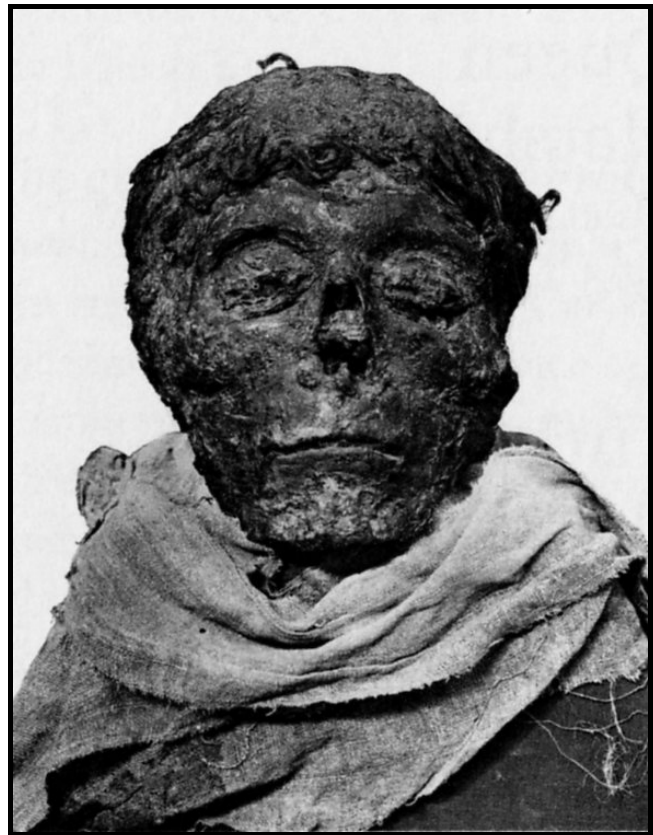
*“And They Made Their Lives Bitter With Hard Bondage” by Julius von Carolsfeld*

The king’s concern was that the Hebrews could align themselves with a resurgent Hyksos invasion entering the Kingdom from the northeast. At the same time, the ruler was fearful that having risen up against his government, the Israelites would then decide to leave the country, thereby depriving Egypt of a valuable source of free labor in the very area where fortifications and military depots were most urgently needed. The Pharaoh’s fear foreshadows exactly what would later occur in the exodus. Ahmose’s solution to the Hebrew peril was shrewdly clever indeed. The problem with the Hebrews was that there were just too many of them. The king’s response was to convert that liability into an asset. Enslave the numerous Israelites and put them to work on the king’s building projects around their home in the Nile delta. **“So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for pharaoh.”** (Exodus 1:11) The reference to the two **“store cities for pharaoh”** reflects the strategic significance of the region. The Hebrew carries the military connotation of garrison towns and/or storage depots for weapons and military supplies. **“Pithom”** means *“the House of Atum,”* referring to the primeval creator god of Egyptian mythology. This is its only mention in Scripture. Its precise location is undetermined. **“Rameses”** means *“Begotten of Ra,”*

in honor of the Egyptian sun god often viewed as the chief God of Egypt's pantheon. This site subsequently came to be associated with Rameses II who made the town his delta residence and carried on extensive construction there. It is located at the modern village of el-Khata'na in the northeastern delta. It should also be noted that this phrase is the first instance in Exodus where the formal Egyptian title "**Pharaoh**" occurs. The term literally means "*great house*" in reference to the royal palace in which the monarch resided. The repetitive language of the text - "***oppress them with forced labor***" - reflects God's prophetic warning to Abraham: "***Then the Lord said to him: 'Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years.'***" (Genesis 15:13) It is clearly the tyrant's hope that by subjecting the people to hard labor both their vitality and growth would be diminished. Keil/Delitsch describes the dual motive at work here in this way:

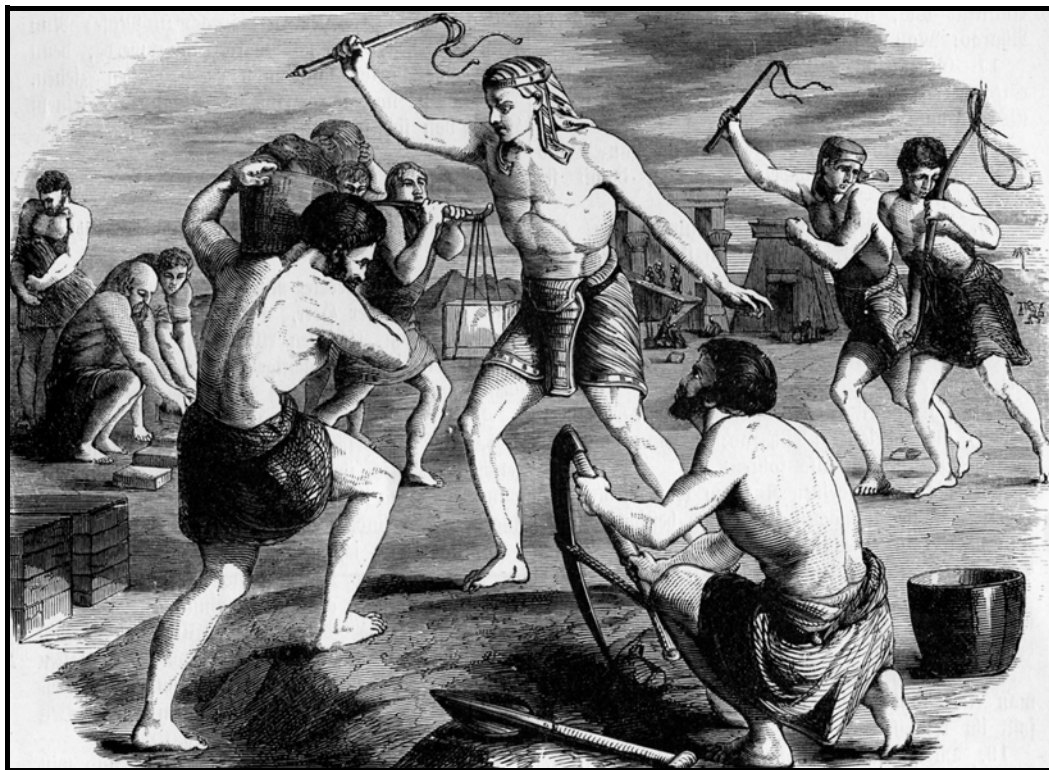
*"By hard feudal labor pharaoh hoped, according to the maxims of tyrants, to break down the physical strength of Israel and lessen its increase - since a population always grows more slowly under oppression than in the midst of prosperous circumstances - and also to crush their spirit so as to banish the very will for liberty."*  
(Keil/Delitsch, p. 323)

However, the schemes of men cannot frustrate the plans and purposes of God: "***But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly***" (Exodus 1:12-13) The brutal oppression of pharaoh seems to have exactly the opposite effect. Instead of inhibiting the growth of Israel, the hard labor only serves to intensify that growth as the nation continued to multiply. The design of the Pharaoh had been to act shrewdly to remove the basis for



*"The Mummy of Ahmose I - Pharaoh of the Oppression"*

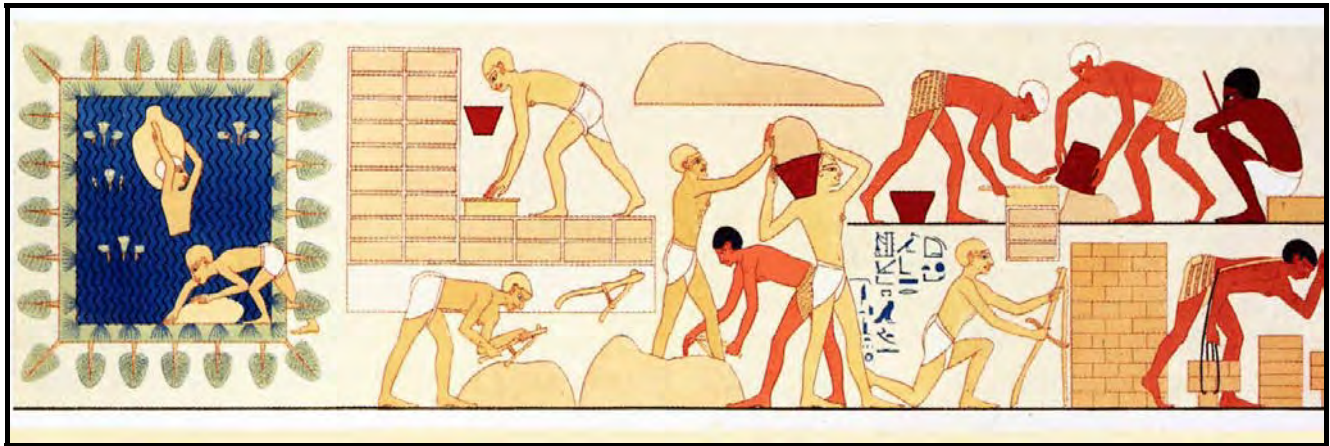
Egypt's concerns. But instead those fears intensify - ***“so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.”*** The language of the text suggests that the Egyptians have begun to recognize the presence of supernatural power at work here. A scheme that normally would have worked only exacerbates the problem. Hebrew scholar Nahum Sarna notes: *“The tyrant’s efforts are inexplicably foiled. Mysteriously, the Israelite population has expanded even more. The lack of a natural explanation for the phenomenon has engendered a sense of disquiet and frustration.”* (Sarna, p.6) But rather than yield to the power of God, the king’s growing sense of uneasiness and fear is expressed by more deliberately brutal oppression - ***“And worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.”*** (Exodus 1:13-14) The labor which has been inflicted upon them was vastly expanded along with the ruthless imposition of brutal force. Not only were the Hebrew slaves called upon to build the fortresses of pharaoh, now they must also form the tens of thousands of bricks that will be necessary for the task, while at the same time carrying out ***“all kinds of work in the fields.”*** The specific mention of the brick-making emphasizes how arduous and time consuming this particular activity was.



***“Egyptian Oppression” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Illustration***



That point will be reiterated again when as further punishment the Hebrews are also forced to provide their own straw for the bricks that they have been compelled to make (cf. Exodus 5:6-9).



*“Mural of Egyptian Brick Makers” from a Tomb in Thebes*

### ***The Pharaoh’s Genocide***

*The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives whose names were Shiprah and Puah, “When you help the Hebrew women in child birth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why Have you let the boys live?” The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.” So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them families of their own. Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every boy that is born you must throw into the river, but let every girl live.”*

It was evident that the monarch’s plans for the suppression of the Israelites continued to flounder for he was compelled to resort to even more gruesome and extreme methods. The king summoned the **“Hebrew midwives”** into his presence. This is the first occurrence of the term **“Hebrew”** in the text of Exodus. It has previously been used in Genesis 14:13 to identify Abraham. The etymology of the term has been the subject of considerable debate among linguists. The name is most probably derived from a form of the word *“beyond,”* referring to Abraham’s origin in the

Mesopotamian cities Ur of the Chaldees and Haran which, from the perspective of Canaan, were “beyond” the Euphrates River. The text refers to two specific individuals, “*Shiphrah and Puah*” both of whose names are Semitic in origin. “*Shipharah*” means “to be beautiful” and “*Puah*” means “a fragrant blossom.” Given the large numbers of the rapidly proliferating Israelites already present, it is likely that these two individuals were not the only midwives involved, but were the senior midwives, representing their guild before the king. “*These two were the overseers of the practitioners, directly responsible to the authorities for the many women under them.*” (Sarna, p.

7)



*“Pharaoh and the Midwives”  
by J. James Tissot*

The king’s instructions were blunt and brutal: “*When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.*” This diabolical plan was designed both to eliminate the security threat posed by the explosive growth of the Israelite people and yet to maintain a constant supply of domestic slaves for the economy of Egypt. Thus, only the male infants were to be eliminated. The language of Verse 16 in the Hebrew text - “*and observe them on the delivery stool*” - is somewhat obscure and has elicited a broad variety of English translation. The original text literally reads “*then look upon the two stones.*”

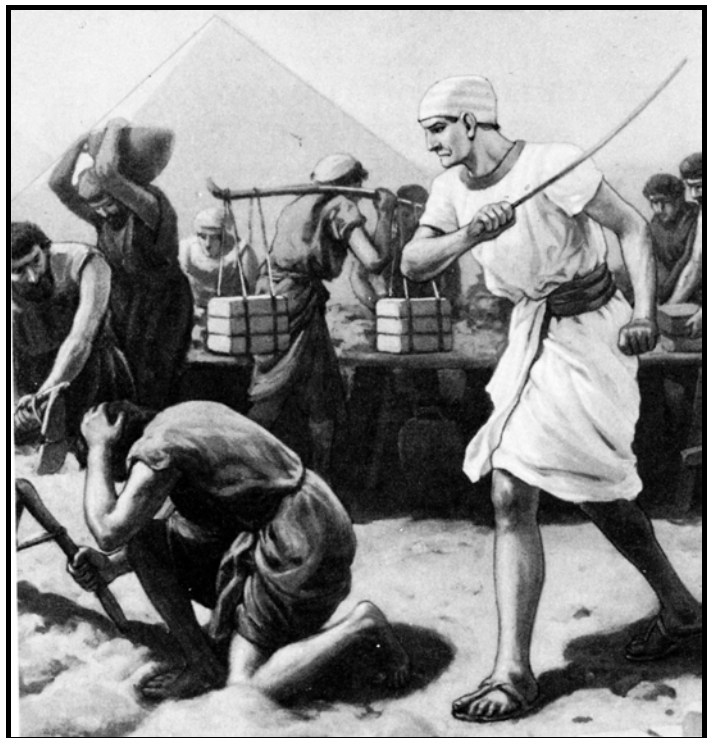
The NIV understands the phrase as a reference to the delivery stool upon which the mother would crouch through the birth process. This is unlikely, given the text’s emphasis on the “*two stones.*” John Durham expresses the less delicate but more compelling view of most contemporary commentators when he argues:

*“The best translation remains ‘stones’ as a euphemism for ‘testicles.’*

*The root of the noun is certainly stone, and its form is clearly dual, thus signifying a pair. Given the point of Pharaoh's instruction, the determination of the sex of the infant at the moment of birth, the term is best understood as a euphemism, in use to this day, for the male genitalia.*" (Durham, p. 12)

The suggestion implicit in Pharaoh's command was that the murder of the male babies was to be performed immediately during the birthing process so that it could be made to appear natural or accidental. The midwives were to kill the baby boys as soon their sex was evident, before the infant had been completely delivered, so that its murder could be concealed. In effect, the king was commanding what our contemporary society would call a "*partial birth abortion*" - the deliberate slaughter of a helpless child in the midst of its birth.

What follows has been aptly described as "*history's first recorded act of civil disobedience in defense of moral imperative.*" (Sarna, p. 7) The text is quite explicit: "***The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.***" Confronted by the cruel and inhuman command of duly constituted human authority, the Hebrew midwives chose to "***obey God rather than men***" (Acts 5:29). Their "*fear*" of God, using the term in the classic sense of respect and reverence for the deity, was greater than their fear of the king's wrath and retribution. They deliberately disobeyed their earthly king's command in deference to the commands of their heavenly King. Such "*fear of God,*" - as indicated in the repetitive language of the Catechism's explanations of each of the Ten Commandments - "*We should fear and love God...*" - is an essential component in the living of the Christian life. E. H. Wendland explains:



***"The Bondage of Israel in Egypt" - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration***



*“We see that a feeling of awesome respect for the almighty God was surely present in Israel...We, too, need to remember that in times of severe trial and temptation the fear of the Lord can sustain us. This is not a slavish fear of punishment. It is rather a consciousness on our part that God is still there...This awesome respect for His presence will bring with it a trust that His power will prevail.” (Wendland, p. 12)*

Pharaoh quickly became aware of the midwives’ disobedience and summoned the



*“Hebrew Boys Cast Into the Nile” by Matthias Merian*

women back into his presence: *“Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, ‘Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?’”* The midwives’ answer was less than candid: *“The midwives answered Pharaoh, ‘Hebrew*



*“The Oppression of Israel in Egypt” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Illustration*

*women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”* Their prevarication was itself an assertion of Hebrew superiority as the women of Egypt are contrasted unfavorably with the women of Israel. The deception appears to have been successful, at least to the extent that the text does not indicate any royal retribution against the women for their actions. God blessed these faithful women for their courageous demonstration of loyalty to Him: ***“So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God He gave them families of their own.”*** St. Augustine is careful to note that the Bible does not commend the midwives for their falsehood but for their fear of God in refusing to obey the immoral command of the king:

*“Thus God rewarded them not, however because they lied, but because they were merciful to the people of God; it was not their falsehood, therefore, that was rewarded, but their kindness, more correctly their fear of God, their benignity of mind, not the wickedness of their lying; and for the sake of what was good God forgave what was evil.”*  
(Keil/Delitsch, p. 326)



*“The Infant Moses” by S. Solomon Delt*

Having failed in his first attempt to murder the male children of Israel through the Hebrew midwives, Egypt’s ruler commanded his own people to slaughter the babies as soon as they were born: **“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: ‘Every boy that is born you must throw into the river, but let every girl live.’** All subtlety and pretense were cast aside as the desperate king openly promulgated his genocidal decree. He enlisted the entire machinery of the state to carry out the annihilation of the nation of Israel. These harsh words set the stage for the story of Moses’ birth which now follows. The rabbinic commentaries note the ironic contrast between the Pharaoh’s deadly intent and God’s saving design - the waters of the river Nile were to be the means by which the boys of Israel were

murdered. Instead that very water became the means by which the life of Moses was spared. No man, no matter how great or powerful he may be, can frustrate the plans and purpose of God. The rabbis went on to note that God’s destruction of Pharaoh and his army in the water of the Red Sea was His divine punishment for the Hebrew babies whom the wicked king had drown in the water of the river.

*“And Pharaoh ordered his officers to go to Goshen, to look for the male babes of the Children of Israel, and when they discovered one, they tore him from his mother’s breast by force, and thrust him into the river. But no one is so valiant as to be able to foil God’s purposes, even though he contrive ten thousand devices to that end...The end of the Egyptians was that they met their death in the billows of the Red Sea. ‘Measure for measure’ - as they had drowned the men of the children of the Israelites, so they were drowned.” (Ginzberg, II, 256,258)*





*“The Infant Moses Upon the Waters of the Nile” by Gustav Dore*

## ***The Deliverance of Moses***

### ***Exodus 2:1-10***

*Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and she gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him. Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” “Yes, go,” she answered, and the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.” So the woman took the baby and nursed him. When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, “I drew him out of the water.”*

***“Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman...”*** - Amid the gruesome brutality of the tyrant’s bloody decree life among the Israelites went on. The text places particular emphasis on the Levitical descent of both parents. The Tribe of Levi would subsequently be designated to provide the priests and high priests of Israel. The fact that Moses is a Levite is an important indication of the nature of his leadership and the pivotal role which he would be called upon to play in the history of the nation as the mediator between God and the people. *“It is an anticipatory clue*

*to both the stature of Moses and the sacerdotal nature of his leadership as Israel’s first great sacral hero.”*

(Durham, p. 16) Elsewhere, Scripture informs us that the names of this couple were Amram and Jochebed: ***“Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived 137 years.”*** (Exodus 6:20) The rabbi’s explain the match as follows:

*“As his life partner, Amram chose his aunt, Jochebed, who was born on the same day with him. She was a daughter of Levi, and she owed her name ‘Divine Splendor’ to the celestial light that radiated from her countenance. She was worthy of being her husband’s helpmate, for she was one of the midwives who had imperiled their own lives to rescue the little Hebrew babes.”* (Ginzberg, II, p. 261)



***“Moses Hidden in the Nile”***  
***by J James Tissot***

The marriage of a nephew to his aunt would later be prohibited by the Mosaic Law as incestuous (cf. Leviticus 18:12). However, at this point that law had not yet been given and such marriages were permitted. Amram and Jochebed already had two children - Miriam, a daughter who was to play a crucial role in the

deliverance of her baby brother, and Aaron, a brother who had been born before the king's decree.

***“When she saw that he was a fine child...”*** - The adjective used in the Hebrew text to describe the newborn is the word *“tov”* which ordinarily means *“good.”* In this context the word probably means *“robust”* or *“healthy.”* This is the same word which occurs repeatedly in the creation account of Genesis 1 to describe that which the Lord God had made: ***“And God saw that it was good.”*** (Genesis 1:10,12,18,21,25,31) The deliberate use of the familiar term here serves to emphasize that this is no ordinary child, but a child sent by Almighty God Himself to be the deliverer of His people. This was a fine, healthy child and his mother could not bear to give him up to the blood-thirsty Egyptians. *“So she hid him away quite tenderly with the stealth and care a treasure would demand.”*

(Durham, p. 16) Her careful concealment of her son lasted for three months but by the end of that time the child had become too active and his voice too strong for his mother to successfully continue to hide him in their home. Jochebed's solution reverberates with the semantic echoes of God's previous acts of deliverance. ***“She got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch.”*** The Hebrew word for her basket is *“tevah”* - literally *“ark.”* In fact, the only other occurrences of *“tevah”* in the Bible are in reference to to the Ark of Noah in which the survivors of humanity



***“The Infant Moses in the Bullrushes”***  
***by Paul Delacroix***





*“Moses Committed to the Nile” by Eugene Thirion*

were delivered from the waters of the Flood. Both Jochebel’s and Noah’s arks were caulked with pitch to make them watertight (cf. Genesis 6:14). Once again, the parallel is designed to remind the reader of the similarity between the two vessels. The ark of Moses is the vessel which will deliver the Deliverer so that he can set God’s people free from their bondage in Egypt. His sister Miriam is set as a guardian to watch over the baby and keep him safe. No doubt she fed and changed him and moved the basket periodically. In Hebrews Chapter 11, the New Testament’s *“Roll Call of the Heroes of Faith,”* Moses’ parents are commended for the courage of their faith in defying the king to preserve their child’s life: ***“By faith Moses’ parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king’s edict.”*** (Hebrews 11:23)

***“Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying and she felt sorry for him. ‘This is one of the Hebrew babies,’ she said.”*** - Once again, the hand of God intervened in a magnificently ironic way. In a sense, Moses’ mother had complied with the decree of Pharaoh. She had, in fact, placed her son in the Nile as commanded. But her action was intended to save the child’s life, not to destroy it. God then moved Pharaoh’s own daughter to come upon the child and to rescue him from her father’s cruel decree. There is no suggestion in the text that the placement

of Moses' little ark among the papyrus reeds was deliberately designed to bring the baby into contact with the princess of Egypt. Nor should there have been any expectation that if a member of the king's household had come upon the child they would have done any other than turn him over to their guards for immediate execution. What happened here was not the design of man but the providence of God. According to the traditional tales of Judaism, God used the deliverance of helpless Moses from mighty Pharaoh to demonstrate His own omnipotence:

*“The Lord replied, ‘You know well that I see all things. The contriving of man can do nothing to change what has been resolved in My counsel. Those do not attain their end who use cunning and malice to secure their own safety, and endeavor to bring ruin upon their fellow men. But he who trusts in Me in his peril will be delivered from the profoundest distress to unlooked for happiness. Thus My omnipotence will reveal itself in the fortunes of this babe.’ At the time of the child’s abandonment, God sent scorching heat to plague the Egyptians, and they all suffered with leprosy and painful boils. Thermutis, the daughter of*



*“The Rescue of Moses” by Raphael*

*Pharaoh, sought relief from the burning pain from a bath in the waters of the Nile...When she saw the little ark floating among the flags on the surface of the water, she supposed it to contain one of the little children exposed at her father's order, and she commanded her handmaids to fetch it...No sooner had she touched the ark than the leprosy afflicting her departed from her. Her sudden restoration led her to examine the contents of the ark and when she opened it her amazement was great. She beheld an exquisitely beautiful boy, for God had fashioned the Hebrew babes body with peculiar care and beside it she perceived the Shekinah. Noticing that the boy bore the mark of the Abrahamic covenant, she knew that he was one of the Hebrew children, and mindful of her father's decree concerning the male children of the Israelites, she was about to abandon the babe to his fate. At that moment, the angel Gabriel came and gave the child a vigorous blow, and he began to cry with a voice like a young mans. His vehement weeping touched the princess and in her pity she was resolved to save him.” (Ginzberg, II, p.266)*



*“The Discovery of Moses” by Carolsfeld*





*“The Rescue of Moses” by Gustav Dore*

*“Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, ‘Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?’ - At the critical moment brave little Miriam stepped forward with the suggestion that she procure the services of a wet nurse from among the Hebrews. Sadly, there were at this time all too many Hebrew mothers whose babies had been taken from them who would be capable of fulfilling this task. But, of course, the clever young lady had one particular mother in mind who would be only too happy to take care of the baby. The princess gave quick assent and Miriam was on her way home.*

*“And the girl went and got the baby’s mother. Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, ‘Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.’ So the woman took the baby and nursed him.” - How wondrous are the ways and workings of God! If the princess of Egypt recognized what was happening here she gave no indication of that recognition. Moses’ mother is hired to nurse her own son by the daughter of the man who had ordered his death!*

*“Thus a second time the shrewdness of Jacob/Israel’s house sparkles, for suddenly Moses’ mother is delivered from her terrible prison of fear to the security of being paid to nurse and nurture her own son. The medium of death thus becomes for Moses the medium of life. His life is moved from danger to privilege. And delivered from a condemnation to grinding slavery, Moses enjoys the best of both worlds possible to him. It is a supreme use of irony as a teaching tool.” (Durham, p. 16)*

The normal period of nursing at this time was about three years (cf. 1 Samuel 1:24),



*"The Discovery of Moses" by J. James Tissot*



during which time Jocebel was to care for the child as if he were her own - which, of course, he was! Thereafter, she took the youth to Pharaoh's palace where his daughter would raise him as her own son: ***“When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him ‘Moses’ saying ‘I drew him out of the water.’”*** Perhaps the daughter of Pharaoh was more perceptive than has been previously indicated. The name which she bestowed upon her adopted son and her explanation of that name revealed a clear recognition of his dual identity and the irony of her role in his deliverance. The name “*Moses*” was common among the Egyptians. It was a form of the verb “*to be born*” and was widely used to name a son. The Egyptians at court would find nothing unusual in that name and naturally assume its meaning. However, the name “*Moses*” in Hebrew is a form of the verb “*to draw out*” and in the Biblical text the Egyptian princess ascribes this Hebrew meaning to the name which she has given her son as a description of the circumstances of his entry into her life. The princess of Egypt appears to have been a most astute young lady.

The phrase ***“and he became her son”*** implies that Moses was raised as a member of the royal household with all of the privileges inherent in that position. In the sophisticated culture of ancient Egypt one of the most important among those privileges would have been a superb education. The martyr Stephen referred to the superior education which Moses received in his speech before the Sanhedrin:

***“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for in his father's house. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”*** (Acts 7:20-22)

First century Jewish historian Philo of Alexandria reported that Moses was an outstanding student whose unique mind sought out not only the wisdom of Egypt, but that of neighboring civilizations as well. Philo detailed the curriculum as follows:

***“Arithmetic, geometry, the lore of meter, rhythm, and harmony, and the whole subject of music...were imparted to him by learned Egyptians. These further instructed him in the philosophy conveyed in symbols...He had the Greeks teach him the rest of the regular school course, and the inhabitants of the neighboring countries for Assyrian literature and the Chaldean science of the heavenly bodies.”*** (Kugel, p. 296)

No doubt the education which Moses received as a prince of Egypt was devoted in large measure to the religion and the magical arts of that ancient land in which religion and the afterlife had always played such a prominent role. Josephus goes so far as to assert that Moses actually became a priest of the Egyptian god Osiris and rose to the exalted rank of priest/king of the Egyptian city of Heliopolis which was the center of the cult of Osiris. (Josephus, p. 618) Such fanciful speculation abounds within the traditions of Judaism, but beyond Stephen's comment, the Bible itself does not address the subject. Whatever his education in Pharaoh's court may have been, it is evident that Moses retained a clear awareness of his identity as a Hebrew and a sense of sympathy with the plight of his own people which would lead to his abrupt departure from the land of Egypt.



*"The Finding of Moses" by J. Y. Hunter*

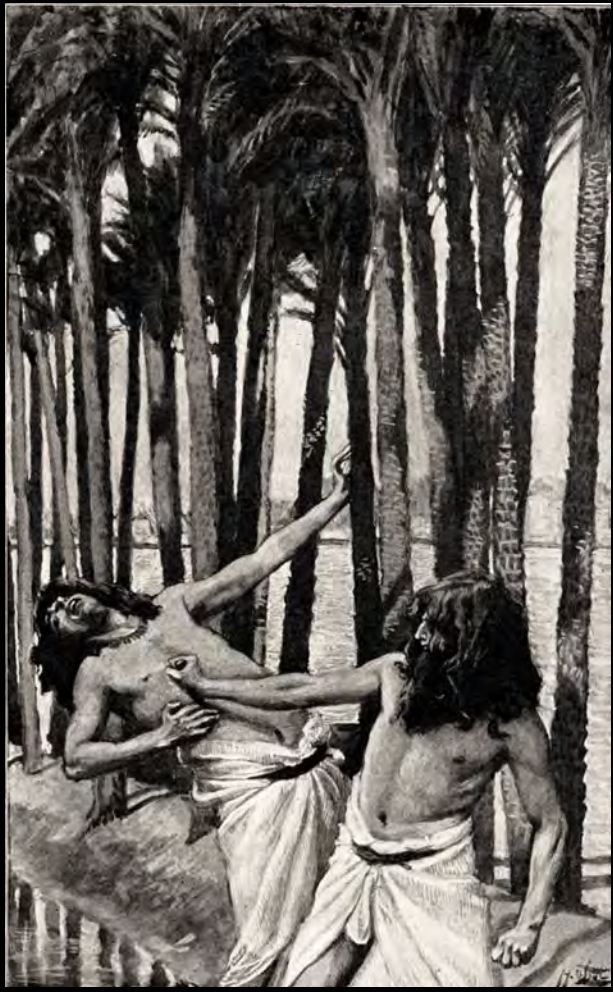




*“Moses Slaying the Egyptian” by E.J. Poynter*

## ***Moses Flight From Egypt to Midian*** ***Exodus 2:11-17***

*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, “Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” The man said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “What I did must have become known!” When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father’s flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.*



***“Moses Murders the Egyptian”***  
***by J. James Tissot***

***“One day after Moses had grown up...”***  
- Neither the specific duration of this interval nor the events which had transpired during Moses’ youth are mentioned in the Exodus text. Instead, we move directly from the baby’s entrance into the household of Pharaoh to the mature man’s precipitous departure from palace life. Stephan’s speech to the Sanhedrin specifies that Moses was forty years old at the time of these events (cf. Acts 7:23). That would place this sequence of events late in the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep I, the second ruler of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. Nor does the Exodus text provide any information as to how Moses’ awareness of his Hebrew identity was maintained. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Commentator Franz Delitsch romantically theorizes:

*“The education of Moses at the Egyptian court could not extinguish the feeling that he belonged to the people of Israel. Our history does not inform us how this feeling, which was inherited*

*from his parents and nourished in him when an infant by his mother’s milk, was fostered still further when he had been handed over to Pharaoh’s daughter, and grew into a firm decided consciousness of will.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 329)

Beautiful notions of genetic predispositions and mother’s milk notwithstanding, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, speculative though it must remain, that some degree of contact was maintained with his Hebrew family throughout the years of Moses’ youth in the palace of Pharaoh.

***“He went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor.”***  
While it does not explain the origin of these feelings, the text makes their existence



very clear. The Hebrew text literally refers to the Hebrews slaves as “*his brethren,*” emphasizing the strong sense of identification which Moses felt with these people. The phrase will recur again in the following verse - “*He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people*” - to stress the crucial point once more. The text also repeats the verb “*he saw*” three times - “*and watched them...He saw an Egyptian beating...and saw two Hebrews fighting.*” This is the same Hebrew verb which had been used three times in the preceding paragraph to describe the discovery of the basket and the Egyptian princess who had looked with compassion on the Hebrew baby within (cf. 2:4-6). Hebrew commentator U. Cassuto notes the significance of the repetition:

*“The word ‘wayyar’ - ‘and he saw’ - occurs thrice in this paragraph and is thereby emphasized; it thus parallels the word ‘watere’ - ‘and she saw’ - which is used three times in the previous paragraph. Such parallels are not fortuitous in Biblical style. It implies that just as his mother and Pharaoh’s daughter took pity on him, even so he took pity on his brethren. He felt compassion for them and was grieved by their burdens.”* (Cassuto, p. 22)



*“Moses Murders the Taskmaster” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*



Three episodes are presented which are designed to reveal the character of Moses as a man who had compassion upon the downtrodden and could not tolerate injustice. In the first, Moses came upon *“an Egyptian beating a Hebrew”* during one of his visits to Goshen. The circumstances of the situation are unclear. It would appear that one of the Egyptian taskmasters was beating a Hebrew slave. Moses intervened on behalf of the slave and in so doing struck down and killed the Egyptian - *“Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.”* The text uses the same verb to describe the actions of both Moses and the Egyptian perhaps thereby suggesting that the taskmaster had been beating the slave to the point of death and that Moses stepped in only to save the life of *“one of his own people.”* If this were the case, that would help to explain the severity of Moses’ response in killing the Egyptian. The words *“glancing this way and that and seeing no one”* appear to remove the possibility that the killing was unpremeditated and accidental. That impression is reinforced by Moses’ subsequent attempt to conceal

the crime by burying the body of his victim in the desert sand. The illegality of Moses’ action is further indicated by Pharaoh’s response - *“When Pharaoh heard of this he tried to kill Moses.”*



*“St. Augustine” by Sandro Botticelli*

St. Augustine discussed the moral ambiguity of this incident at some length in defending the integrity of the Biblical narrative against the charges of Faustus the Manichaean heretic. The learned Church Father acknowledged that *“In light, then, of the eternal law, it was wrong for one who had no legal authority to kill the man, even though he was a bad character besides being the aggressor.”* But without attempting to excuse Moses’ sin, Augustine argued that his wrongful action revealed *“the zeal of the future champion of his people”* which God would later direct and use to

accomplish the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage:

*“So the disposition of mind which led Moses to take the law into his own hands, to prevent the wrong done to his brother, living among strangers, from a wicked citizen of the country from being unrequited, was not unfit for the production of virtue, but from want of culture gave signs of its productiveness in an unjustifiable manner.”* (NPNF, 4, p.299)

Augustine compared the sinful actions of the young Moses to those of Saul who carried on bitter and bloody persecution of the Christian Church before God transformed him into Paul, the great champion of Christianity (Acts 8:1-3); and of the apostle Peter who sinfully assaulted the servant of the High Priest and cut off his ear in the Garden of Gethsemane, only to be rebuked by Christ for his violent action (cf. Matthew 26:51-54). In all three of these instances (Moses - Paul - Peter), Augustine contended, God used the same *“fierce zeal”* which had first expressed itself in violent sin to produce a great leader of His people.



*“Peter Cuts Off the Ear of Malchus” by Matthias Merian*



*“But that after this sin Peter should become a pastor of the Church was no more improper than that Moses, after smiting the Egyptian, should become the leader of the congregation. In both cases, the trespass originated not in inveterate cruelty, but in a hasty zeal which admitted of correction. In both cases, there was resentment against injury, accompanied in one case by love for a brother, and in the other by love, though still carnal, of the Lord. Here was evil to be subdued or rooted out, but the heart, with such capacities needed only, like good soil, to be cultivated to make it fruitful in virtue.”* (NPNF,4, p. 299)

Nahum Sarna, a contemporary Jewish Old Testament scholar, comes to a similar conclusion in his assessment of the text. Sarna notes that the incident is designed to *“illustrate the prime qualities of Moses’ character and personality - his intolerance of oppression and his wholehearted identification with the plight of his people”* and concludes with this careful word of caution:

*“Certainly the story does not lend itself to any interpretation that seeks to find in the incident a justification for the use of violence as an instrument to achieve what may be viewed as a desirable end. There is no ideology of protest at work in the story, and Moses is not praised for his deed. There is only a tale about an isolated event, an impetuous and spontaneous outpouring of righteous indignation in response to a specific situation. The counter assault was directed against the perpetrator of the atrocity, not indiscriminately aimed against anyone who is perceived to be a symbol of the coercive power of the state.”*  
(Sarna, p. 34)

The New Testament alludes to this episode twice, first in Stephen’s address to the Jewish Sanhedrin and again in the *“Roll Call of the Heroes of Faith”* in the Letter to the Hebrews. Both texts focus on the Moses’ willingness to risk his own status and safety in the defense of one of his kinsmen as an indication of his faith:

***“When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian and avenged him by killing the Egyptian.”*** (Acts 7:23-24)

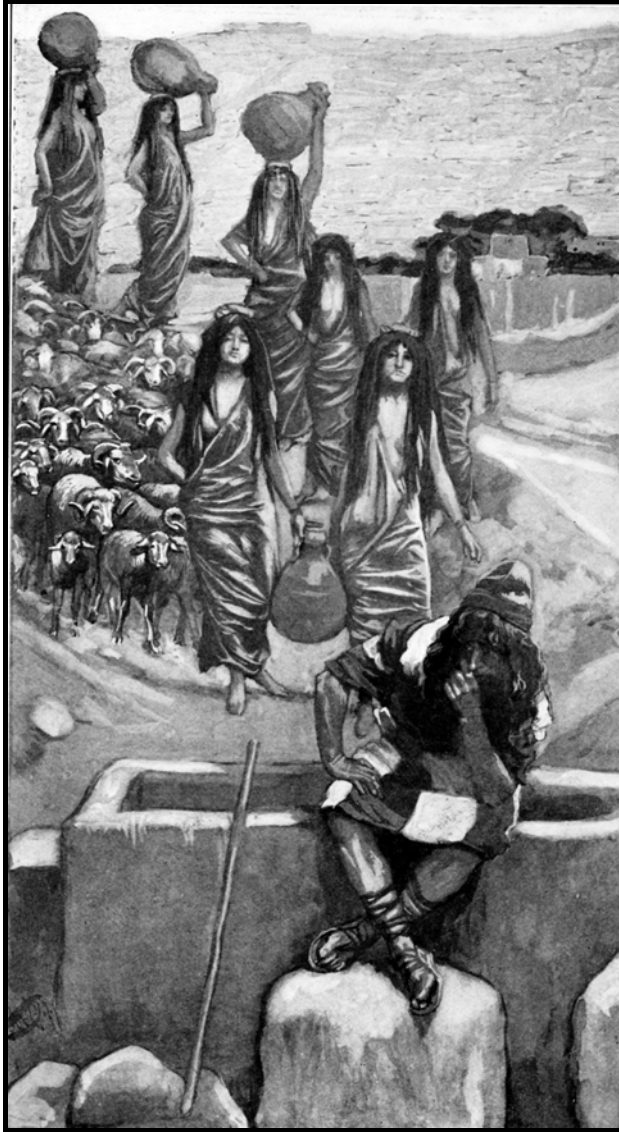
***“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the***



*St. Stephen Preaching to the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem” by Vittore Carpaccio*

*son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible.”(Hebrews 11:24-27)*

*“The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting...” - The second of the three character sketches also took place in Goshen. On the day after his encounter with the Egyptian task master, Moses intervened in a struggle between two Hebrews. He admonished the instigator of the fight - **“He asked the one in the wrong, ‘Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?’”** Moses’ choice of words - **“your fellow Hebrew”** -*



*“Moses by the Well at Midian”  
by J. James Tissot*

indicated once again the high priority which he placed on Israelite solidarity. The Jews were an oppressed people and as such, they needed to stick together and defend one another. For Moses, as one whose sense of national identity had been complicated by his adoption into the household of Pharaoh, this solidarity seemed especially valuable. Accordingly, this fight between two Jews was particularly offensive to him. But his admonition was quickly and completely rejected by the aggressor: ***“The man said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?’”***

These harsh words revealed Moses as a man without a country. By killing the taskmaster he had forfeited the possibility of life as a member of Egypt’s royal elite. And yet, despite the risk that he had taken, the malefactor’s scornful rejection of his intervention indicated that the Jews still viewed him as an outsider, perhaps even a traitor because of the life of ease which this Hebrew had been enjoying until now. Stephen would later suggest that already at this point Moses had

thought of himself as the potential liberator of Israel and had entertained some aspirations that his own people would see him the same way:

***“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you want to hurt each other?’ But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as***



*you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ When Moses heard this he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.” (Acts 7:25-29)*

If that was the case, this incident would certainly have dashed any such hopes. Developing this concept, commentator William H. C. Propp argues that these relatively insignificant episodes are of crucial importance in preparing Moses for his leadership role and defining the nature of that leadership. Dr. Propp offers these profoundly insightful observations:

*“Viewed from this perspective, the seemingly minor altercations in Exodus 2 set up the remainder of the Pentateuch. They show the necessity for a society governed by divinely inspired law (“torah”), not rough justice. Moses the vigilante, with his instinct for equity, must become Moses the prophetic Lawgiver. The impetuous youth will mature into the archetype of humility (Numbers 11-12), so popular an arbiter that he must delegate his authority to other ‘rulers’ and ‘judges’ (Exodus 18:13-26). Conversely, Israelite hostility toward Moses, first*



*“Moses at the Well of Midian” by Mathias Merian*

*articulated by the wicked Hebrew, becomes a consistent theme for the rest of the Torah. As one Israelite malfasant questions the authority of the man who rescued one Israelite from one Egyptian, so the Israelite people will continually question the authority of him who saved all Israel from Egypt (cf. Acts 7:35-53).” (Propp, p. 168)*



*“The Finding of Moses” by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema*

But even more disturbing was Moses’ realization that his murder of the Egyptian was already public knowledge! Either the Hebrew slave whom he had rescued had talked, or there had been other witnesses whom he had not seen. In any case, the word of his crime was obviously traveling fast and it was only a matter of time until his step-grandfather, the Pharaoh discovered what he had done. The text notes: **“Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’”** And his fear was well founded for **“When Pharaoh heard of this he went to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian where he sat down by a well.”** Pharaoh Amenhotep I could not allow such an action to go unpunished. An adopted member of his own household - who was Hebrew by birth - had struck down an Egyptian taskmaster who had been carrying out his duty as an officer of Pharaoh! This crime

demanded swift and severe punishment.

The apparent contradiction between the explicit assertion of Moses' fearfulness in Exodus and the equally explicit affirmation of Hebrews that faith, not fear, motivated Moses' departure from Egypt has caused some consternation among conservative Bible scholars.

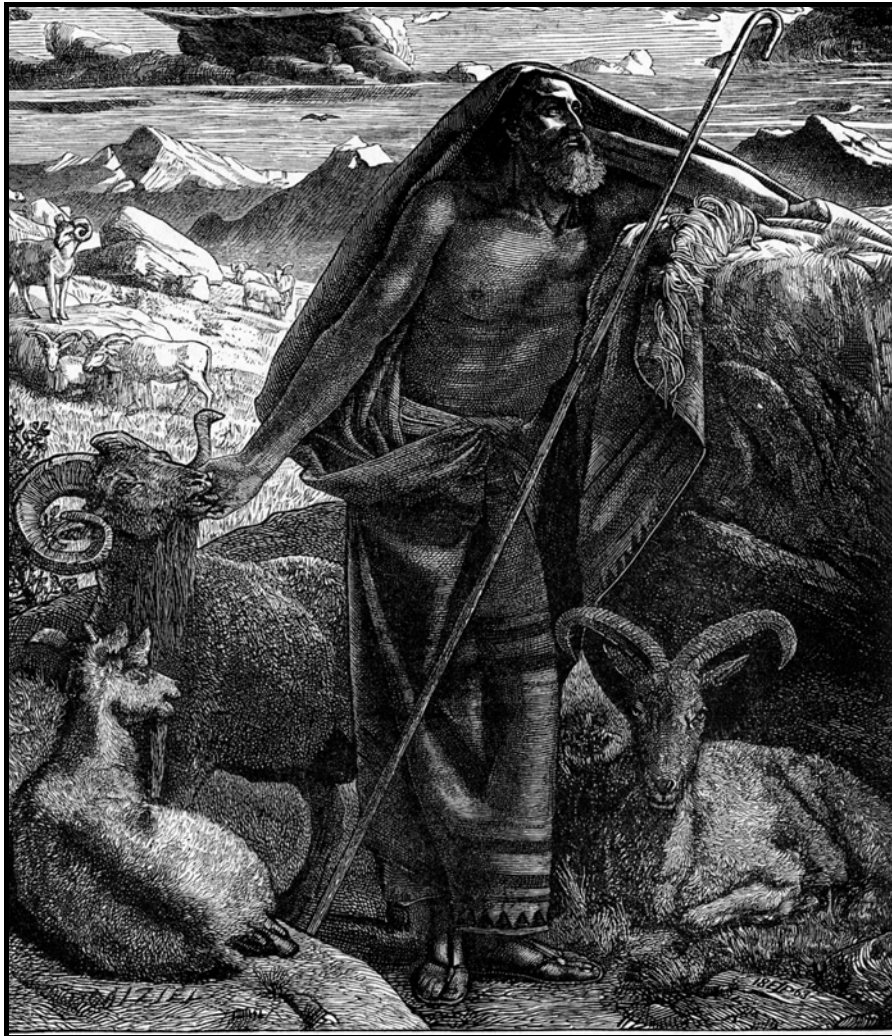
***“Then Moses was afraid and thought, ‘What I did must have become known.’ When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well.”*** (Exodus 2:14-15)

***“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king’s anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible”*** (Hebrews 11:26-27)

Renown New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce offers this most helpful explanation of the variance in the texts as part of his commentary of the Letter to the Hebrews:

*“With the forward looking faith Moses abandoned Egypt. His heart renunciation of Egypt with all that Egypt had to offer him, was the essential act of faith; but our author probably thinks of the occasion when he left Egypt to live in the wilderness of Midian, a stranger in a strange land. A difficulty may be felt here since the Exodus narrative tells how Moses was afraid when he realized that his killing of the Egyptian whom he saw mistreating a Hebrew was public knowledge...Our author, who follows the Biblical record so closely, certainly does not intend to contradict it, but rather to interpret it. ‘The fear of Moses is not immediately connected with his flight in the Hebrew story, so that the author may have felt warranted by this in denying that the flight was due to fear.’ He was afraid, admittedly, but that was not why he left Egypt; his leaving Egypt was an act of faith...By his impulsive act of violence he had burned his boats so far as the court of Egypt was concerned; but he might have raised a slaves’ revolt then and there. By faith, however, he did nothing of the kind; ‘he had the insight to see that God’s hour had not yet struck, and therefore he resolutely turned his back on the course he had begun to tread, and retraced his steps till he*

*entered on the harder way. For it was harder to live for his people than to die for them.’” (Bruce, p. 321-322)*



*“Moses in Midian” by E. J. Poynter*

The land of **“Midian”** is the place where Moses found refuge from Amenhotep’s wrath. The Midianites were a loose confederation of five semi-nomadic tribes (cf. Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:21) who were descended from Midian, a son of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2). These tribesmen roamed over a wide geographic area which ranged from the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba northward into the Syro-Arabian Desert around the southeastern borders of what would later become the land of Israel and west into the Sinai Peninsula. Midian was a land well outside of Egypt’s direct sphere of influence, away from the main lines of trade and communication.



Thus it was well suited to provide a safe refuge for Moses the fugitive. Having come to Midian, Moses rested at the side of a well, the common meeting place for shepherds, townsfolk and travelers in the desert.



*“Moses at the Well of Midian” by Sandro Botticelli*

## ***Moses in the Household of Jethro*** ***Exodus 2:16-25***

*Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs and water their father’s flock. Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock. When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, “Why have you returned to early today?” They answered, “An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.” “And where is he?” he asked his daughters. “Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat.” Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. Zipporah gave birth to a son and Moses named him Gershom, saying, “I have become an alien in a foreign land.” During that long period, the king of*



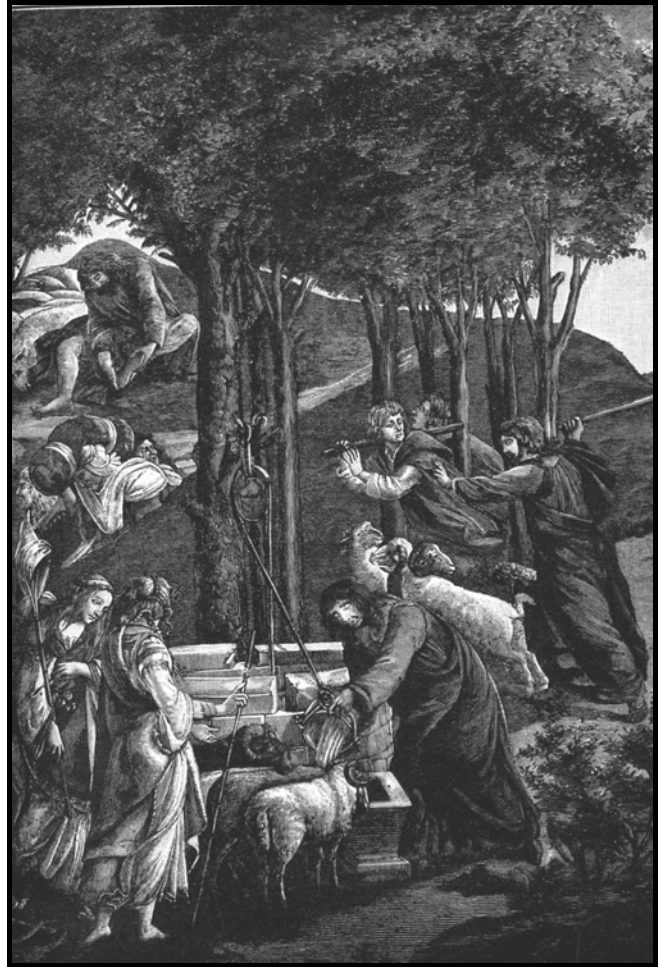
*Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And so God looked upon the Israelites and was concerned about them.*



*“Moses Rescues the Daughters of Jethro” by J. James Tissot*

*“Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters...”* - This segment begins with the introduction of the high priest of Midian. His prominence at the beginning of the episode signals that this individual will play an important role in the life of Moses. The fact that he is first introduced by title rather than by name stresses the crucial significance of his allegiance to the true God. The Hebrew term *“kohen,”* the standard Old Testament word for a priest in the service of God, designates the man’s office within this clan of Midianites. Rabbinic tradition indicates that Jethro and his family were outcasts among the tribes of Midian because he had repudiated the idol worship of his kinsman and was determined to worship the one God alone. For this reason, the tradition says, the shepherds of Midian would drive his daughters away from the well and prevent them from watering their father’s flocks. In this light,

Moses' intervention on their behalf becomes all the more significant. In Verse 18, we are told that the priest's name was "**Reuel**" which means "*friend of God.*" (cf. Numbers 10:29). Elsewhere Reuel is designated as "**Jethro**" ("*his abundance*") (cf. Exodus 3:1; 18:1,2,5,6,9,12). Some linguists suggest that Reuel is his personal name in contrast to Jethro which is a title meaning "*His Excellency*" in reference to Reuel's position as High Priest and Sheik.



*"Moses And the Daughters of Reuel"*

The incident at the well sets the stage for Moses' favorable reception into the household of Jethro. When the girls returned home from watering the flocks uncharacteristically early, their father asked for an explanation. They informed him of their "*rescue*" at the hands of an Egyptian stranger - "**An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock.**" Jethro was astonished that his daughters had not brought their benefactor back with them and immediately sent them back to the well to invite Moses home for dinner. Moses went on to marry "**Zipporah**" ("*Little Bird*"), one of Jethro's daughters. These events parallel the marriage of Isaac to Rebekah (Genesis 24) and Jacob to Rachel (Genesis 29), both of which took place after an encounter at a well. In the case of the latter, Jacob actually watered her father Laban's sheep for Rachel and then became a part of his household, marrying two of his daughters (Leah and Rachel). The parallelism in the three narratives places Moses firmly in the patriarchal tradition and serves to identify him with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

**"Zipporah gave birth to a son..."** - Although Midian provided a safe refuge, it was still a place of banishment. The birth of Moses' first-born son provides the opportunity for him to express the bitter humiliation and disillusionment which he



***“Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro”***  
***by Rosso Fiorentino***

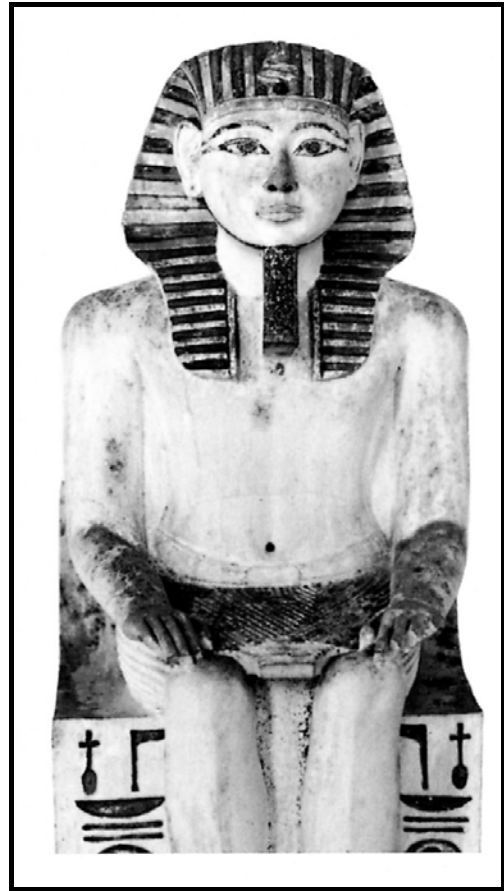
continued to feel throughout his sojourn in Midian. He named the boy ***“Gershom”*** which is based on the Hebrew word for ***“banishment.”*** The text explains: ***“Moses named him Gershom, saying, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land.’”*** Moses’ sad words were a paraphrase of God’s prophecy of Egyptian bondage to Abraham: ***“Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.”*** (Genesis 15:13). His comment demonstrated that even in far off Midian ***“his attachment to his people and his longing to rejoin them, instead of cooling, grew stronger and stronger.”*** (Keil/Delitsch, p. 333)

These events in Midian demonstrate the process of maturation which is taking place within Moses. Once again he is called upon to intervene on behalf of the innocent and the oppressed. But this time he does so with a calmness and restraint which were lacking in the two previous episodes. Impetuous anger has given way to compassion and courtesy and as a result the outcome of Moses’ actions is constructive as he gains a wife and is welcomed into the family of an important leader. Moses’ remained in Midian for forty years (Acts 7:29).

***“During that long period, the King of Egypt died.”*** - But while Moses’ circumstances in Midian were improving, the situation of Israel in Egypt was rapidly deteriorating. Amenhotep I, the Pharaoh who had originally pursued Moses, had died shortly after



Moses' flight to Midian. He was succeeded by his nephew, Thutmose I who reigned for eighteen years. Thutmose I had four children, with his main wife, three of whom predeceased him. Only his daughter, Hatshepsut, outlived her father. She, in turn, was married to her half-brother, her father's son by a lesser wife, who became Pharaoh Thutmose II. Hatshepsut is one of the most remarkable women in Egyptian history. She reigned at the side of her husband, Thutmose II, as an aggressive and ambitious queen. After his unexpected death she became regent and, in effect, Pharaoh of Egypt, during the first twenty-two years of her step son's reign. His

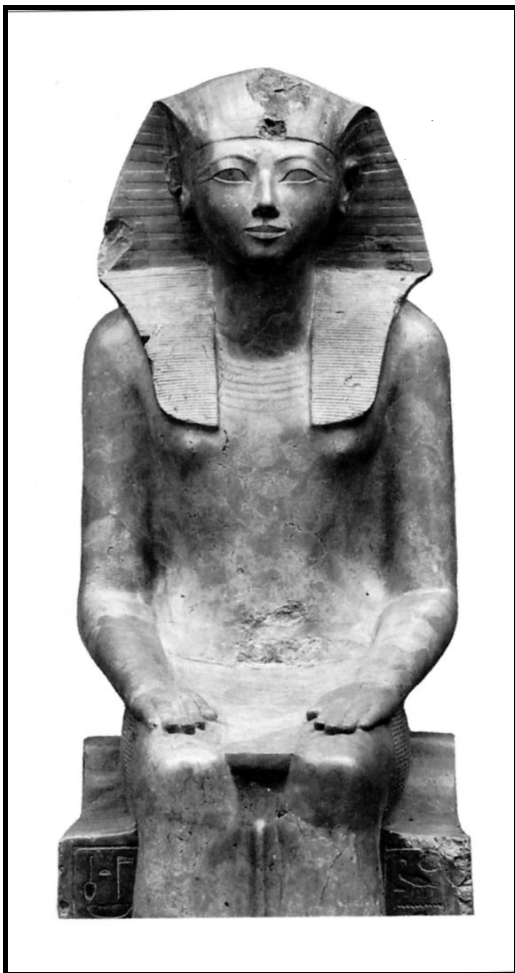


*“Statue of Amenhotep I”*

royal title was Thutmose III, and he ascended to the throne while still a young child. Hatshepsut is often depicted

in the crowns and royal robes of the Pharaoh, at times even wearing a false beard. After he finally managed to remove her from power, Thutmose III had most of her monuments and images destroyed. The statue depicted on this page was preserved only because it was pushed off a cliff in the quarry where it had been carved and remained buried in debris until its discovery by modern archaeologists.

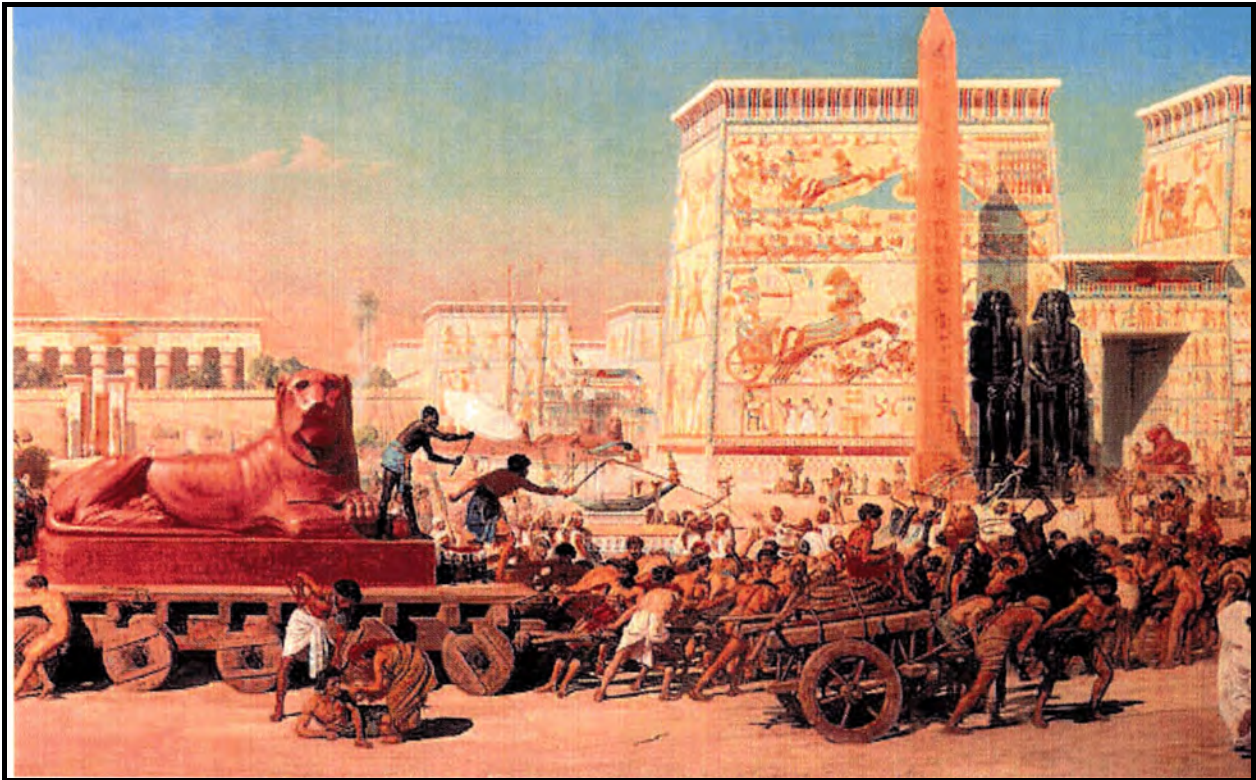
The forty years of Moses' sojourn in Midian took place during the end of Amenhotep I's reign, throughout the eighteen year rule of Thutmose I, and well into the reign of Thutmose II. With the



*“Hatshepsut - Queen of Egypt”*



coming of each new monarch, the people of Israel longed for a lightening of their burdens. Historically, it was established practice in Egypt for a new king to celebrate his accession to the throne by granting amnesty to criminals, by releasing prisoners, and by freeing slaves. An inscription composed in honor of the coronation of Pharaoh Ramses IV records that it was “*a happy day*” for Egypt when “*fugitives returned to their towns*” and when “*those in hiding emerged*” and “*those in prison were freed.*” (Saarna, p. 13) So there was some precedent upon which the Hebrew slaves could pin their hopes but each time those hopes were dashed as the oppression of the nation



*“Israel in Egypt” by Edward John Poynter*

only became more bitter and brutal.

***“The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning...”*** - The intensity of the nation’s suffering is expressing is a series of four strong verbs, one heaped upon the next so that their repetition might reinforce the message of misery - ***“groaned”*** - ***“cried out”*** - ***“cry for help”*** - ***“groaning.”*** The words literally refer to agonized screams and moans of someone in excruciating pain. The text’s fourfold emphasis on

the suffering of the Hebrew slaves is reflected by a second series of four strong verbs which describe the divine response. God **“heard their groaning” - “remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” - “looked on the Israelites”** and **“was concerned about them.”** This is the language of God’s covenant relationship with the people whom He has chosen to play a unique role in His plan for the salvation of sinful humanity. Cassutto illustrates the manner in which the experiences of the fathers in Genesis had foreshadowed the history of their descendants here described:

*“The verbs, ‘remember,’ ‘see,’ and ‘hear’ have already occurred a number of times in the narratives of the Book of Genesis to indicate the paternal relationship of God to His suffering, pain-racked creatures. Thus He remembered Noah and the beasts (Genesis 8:1); He remembered Abraham for the benefit of Lot (Genesis 19:29); He remembered Rachel who was barren (Genesis 30:22); He saw the affliction of Leah (Genesis 29:31), and the suffering of Jacob in Laban’s house (Genesis 31:12,42); He heard the affliction of Hagar (Genesis 16:11), the voice of Ishmael (Genesis 21:17), the voice of Leah who was disliked (Genesis 29:33), the voice of childless Rachel (Genesis 30:6), and, again, the prayers of Leah and Rachel (Genesis 30:17,22).”*  
(Cassutto, p. 29)

Each of these verbs carries the connotation of loving concern, the concern of a father for His own children. R.J. Rushdooney correctly points out that God’s attitude toward Israel in this instance is an expression of His nature as a God of grace, rather



**“Hagar and Ishmael in the Wilderness”**  
**by Jean Charles Cazin**

than the result of any special virtue or qualification in the descendants of Abraham. God loved them because it is His nature to love, in spite of who they were, not because of who they were. In the language of theology that undeserved love of God which is the source and basis of our salvation is called “*prevenient grace*.” Dr. Rushdooney explains:

*“‘They cried out’ and God was mindful of their cry because of His covenant’s sake; God heard them and ‘knew them,’ i.e. recognized their place in His covenant plan. We are not to assume any merit or religious growth on their part at this time. God simply manifested prevenient grace. Although the term is now much neglected, prevenient grace is basic to Scripture and to life. Prevenient means ‘that which goes before;’ it means that, before we are redeemed, a long chain of providence and guided and prepared us for the present time, for the future and for all eternity.*

*Prevenient grace means that there is more to our lives than our own will and act, and that there is much more to history than man.”* (Rushdooney, p. 28)



*“Abraham Sacrificing Isaac” by Allori*

The phrase “*he remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob*” does not imply forgetfulness. Instead, this language connotes devoting one’s full attention to something that is already familiar or well-known. Nahum Sarna describes the full sense of the Hebrew verb in this way: *The Hebrew stem z-k-r connotes much more than the recall of things past. It means, rather to be mindful, to pay heed, signifying a sharp focusing of attention upon someone or something. It embraces concern and involvement and is active, not passive, so that it eventuates in action.*” (Sarna, p. 13) All of this powerful covenant language





*“Moses and the Burning Bush” by John Martin*

sets the stage for that which is to follow. God is about to act to accomplish the deliverance of His people.

## *The Appearance of God to Moses*

### *Exodus 3:1-6*

*Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight - why the bush does not burn up.” When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” Then He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.*



***“Now Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law...”*** - While Israel continued to endure the torment of Egyptian bondage, Moses had settled into the peaceful routine of his new life in Midian. There is no indication that he sought or expected the encounter with God which was about to occur. The fact that he has been entrusted with the clan’s flocks - the basis for their livelihood and very survival - is indicative



***“Moses at the Burning Bush” by Stefan Busch - 1494***

of the fact that Moses has now become a trusted member of the household of Jethro. Once again, Jethro’s identity as one who serves the true God is emphasized by the otherwise superfluous repetition of his identity as ***“the priest of Midian.”***

***“And he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.”*** - The Midianites were nomadic herders who tended to range over wide areas in search of adequate pasture for their flocks. In this case, it would appear that Moses had traveled farther than usual, far beyond the clan’s normal grazing range. The Hebrew text emphasizes the unusual distance involved with a phrase which literally means ***“behind the wilderness.”*** In the directional orientation of these ancient herdsman, east - the direction from which the sun rose - was front; and west - the

direction in which the sun set - was behind. Accordingly, the message here is that Moses led the flocks out across the empty and uninhabited desert of the Sinai Peninsula - *“the wilderness”* - which lay to the west of the traditional grazing range of the Midianites. The text indicates that Moses ultimately came to *“Horeb, the mountain of God.”* *“Horeb”* means *“desolate”* or *“dry.”* It is often used in Scripture as an alternate designation for Mt. Sinai. So Moses recalled the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Horeb and warned the Children of Israel: *“At Horeb you aroused the Lord’s wrath so that He was angry enough to destroy you. When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the Lord had made with you.”* (Deuteronomy 9:8-9; cf. also Exodus 33:6; Deuteronomy 1:2,6,19; 4:10,15; 5:2; 9:8-17; 18:16; 28:69). The term *“Horeb,”* however, also appears to be used more generally not only in reference to one specific peak, but to a range of mountains throughout the area. The specific location of Mt Horeb - Mt. Sinai - is not indicated here, nor elsewhere in Scripture. The traditional site in southern Sinai, currently designated in Arabic as *“Jebel Musa”* (*“Moses’ Mountain”*), did not come into prominence until the Fourth Century A.D. The present Monastery of St. Catherine on the northwest slope of the mountain was established by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in A.D. 527. Near the monastery is the *“Valley of Jethro,”* believed to be the site of the Burning Bush. Cassuto argues that the lack of Scriptural specificity in locating the Mountain of God was by



*“Moses at the Burning Bust”* by Georg Lemberger - 1540

deliberate design in order to frustrate Israel's inclination to manipulate God, like the idol worshipers all around them, by restricting Him to a particular location where they might approach Him on their own terms.

*"The text gives us no details that can help us to determine the site, and possibly this silence is not unintended. Just as the Torah did not desire to associate the theophany expressly with a specific time, even so it did not wish to link it to a definite place, so that a person should not be able to corporealize the memory of the event...It is fitting that the happening should remain shrouded in the mists of sanctity." (Cassutto, p. 225)*



*"Jebel Musa" by Elijah Walton*

It is indeed significant that although the two of the most important events in her religious history occurred on Mt. Sinai (the Call of Moses and the Giving of the Ten Commandments) Israel never made any attempt to convert the mountain into a holy place or a shrine. This was a radical break with all of the other religions of the ancient world and a recognition of the absolute transcendence of God. God's people



apparently understood that what happened there was important, not where it happened. *“There the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush.”* - The *“Angel of the Lord”* (Hebrew - *“Malakh Jahweh”*) or the *“Angel of God”* (Hebrew (*“Malakh Elohim”*)) is the characteristic Old Testament designation for the pre-incarnate Son of God. The Lord Christ is active and involved in the unfolding plan of salvation throughout the Old Testament. As the divine Messenger (*“malakh”*) of God, He appears in divine majesty, acts with divine power and authority, and conveys a saving message of divine grace. The Angel of the Lord appears in twenty-five Old Testament texts, always in connection with the formation, protection, judgement, or deliverance of the covenant people of God. The



*“The Angel of the Lord Before Balaam”  
by F. G. Waltges*

Old Testament passage which describe the activities of the Angel of the Lord include the following:

- Genesis 16:7-14 - The Promise of Nation to Hagar
- Genesis 21:14-21 - The Deliverance of Hagar and Ishmael
- Genesis 22:9-18 - The Sacrifice of Isaac
- Genesis 28:12-22 - Jacob’s Ladder (cf. 31:11-13)
- Genesis 32:24-30 - Jacob Wrestles With God (cf. Hosea 12:3-5)
- Genesis 48:15-16 - The Blessing of Joseph’s Sons
- Exodus 3:2-6 - Moses at the Burning Bush
- Exodus 14:19 - The Pillar of Cloud and Fire (cf. Also 13:21-22;23:20-23)
- Numbers 22:22-35 - Balaam and the Donkey
- Joshua 5:13 - 6:4 - The Call of Joshua
- Judges 2:1-5 - The Rebuke of Israel
- Judges 6:11-24 - The Call of Gideon



Judges 13:2-23 - The Announcement of Samuel's Birth  
 2 Samuel 24:15-17 - King David's Census  
 2 Kings 1:13-17 - The Lord's Judgement on Ahaziah  
 2 Kings 19:35-36 - The Destruction of Sennacherib  
 1 Chronicles 21:11-30 - King David's Census (cf. 2 Chronicles 3:1)  
 Psalm 34:7 - The Angel of the Lord Encamps  
 Psalm 35:5,6 - The Angel of the Lord Pursuing His Enemies  
 Isaiah 63:8-9 - The Angel and Israel  
 Daniel 3:19-28 - The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace  
 Daniel 6:16-24 - Daniel in the Lion's Den  
 Zechariah 1:7-13 - A Prayer for Mercy  
 Zechariah 3:1-7 - The Deliverance of Joshua  
 Malachi 3:1-3 - The Angel of the Covenant



*“Daniel in the Lions’ Den” by Breton Rivere*

Thus, throughout the Old Testament the Angel of the Lord is the pre-incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. As the divine Messenger of God, He appears in divine majesty, acts with divine power and authority, and conveys a saving message of divine love. The *“Malakh Jahweh”* was a well-known figure to the Children of Israel; a beloved demonstration of their God’s care and concern for them. At the same time, the *“Malakh”* was a scourge of heavenly judgement upon the enemies of

God's people.

To the great theologians of classic Lutheranism, the Old Testament texts from Genesis to Malachi which spoke of the Angel of the Lord were a clear indication of the doctrine of the Trinity. The ease with which the passages ascribe divine names and attributes to the Angel of the Lord, while at the same time distinguishing Him from God the Father, are completely consistent with a Trinitarian understanding of the one God in three separate and distinct persons. Phillippi, a confessional Lutheran theologian of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Germany, argued that no one who recognized the Old Testament as the inspired Word of God could possibly dismiss the large number of texts which describe the Angel of the Lord as the second Member of the Divine Trinity:



***“The Angel of the Lord Striking Down the Host of Sennacharib” by Gustav Dore***

*“The Angel of the Lord is different from Jehovah in regard to His Person, and yet one with Him in essence...In their native sense, these passages teach that the Angel of the Lord is the uncreated angel, identical with Jehovah, to whom divine attributes, works, names, and worship are ascribed. If we found in these passage only Oriental hyperbolism, then we would sacrifice the solid basis for Scripture interpretation, and, following such a course consistently, would with the rationalist dissolve and cancel even the firmest and most indestructible revelation.” (Pieper, I, p. 397)*

In this context, it is most fitting that the Angel of the Lord would be the agency through which God revealed Himself to call Moses as the deliverer of Israel from

Egyptian bondage. Fourth Century Latin hymnist Prudentius composed this eloquent song of praise and thanksgiving to the God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush and saw in its twisted branches a foreshadowing of Christ's entry into our sinful world:

*“It was the Word, breathed from the Father’s mouth,  
Who in the Virgin took a mortal frame.  
The human form that not yet in the flesh  
Appeared to Moses wore a brow like ours,  
Since God, who would by power of the Word  
Assume a body, made the face the same.  
Flames rose and seemed to burn the thorny bush.  
God moved amid the branches set with spines,  
And tresses of the flames swayed harmlessly,  
That He might shadow forth His Son’s descent  
Into our thorny members sin infests  
With teeming briars and fills with bitter woes.  
For tainted at its root that noxious shrub  
Had sprouted from its baneful sap a crop  
Of evil shoots beset with many thorns.”* (Lienhardt, p. 10)

**“Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.”** - The unusual sight of a bush in flames that was not being consumed by the fire attracted Moses' attention and he ascended the mountain slope to examine the phenomenon more closely. The bush in question is a common thornbush, one of a number of varieties which manage to survive in the harsh desert environment. In his *“Life of Moses,”* Philo of Alexandria perceived in this paltry shrub an appropriate image of God's chosen people as a scorned and oppressed minority among the great nations of the earth which would persevere and ultimately overcome.

*“There was a bush, a thorny puny sort of plant, which, without anyone setting it on fire, suddenly started burning, and, although spouting flames from its roots to the tips of its branches, as if it were a mighty fountain, it nonetheless remained unharmed. So it did not burn up, indeed it appeared rather invulnerable; and it did not serve as fuel for the fire, but seemed to use the fire as its fuel...For the bush was a symbol of those who suffer the flames of injustice, just as the fire symbolized those responsible for it; but that which burned did not burn up, and*

*those who suffered injustice were not to be destroyed by their oppressors.” (Kugel, p. 302)*



*“The Call of Moses” - Bible Woodcut by Johann Teufel - 1572*

The image of Egyptian bondage as a burning fire is reinforced by Moses’ words to the Children of Israel in Deuteronomy 4:20 where he compares the suffering of the Israelite slaves to the fire of an **“iron-smelting furnace:”** - **“But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of His inheritance, as you now are.”**

**“When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, ‘Moses! Moses!’”** - The voice of God called out to Moses as he approached the burning bush. God addressed Moses in a personal and an emphatic manner - **“Moses! Moses!”** The repetition serves to emphasize the urgency of the address. Moses’ response is simple and direct - **“Here I am”** - free of any indication of doubt or hesitation. Cassutto contends that these brief words signal Moses’ recognition that



he was confronted by “*something exalted and sublime*” and that he was “*prepared to hear and obey.*” (Cassutto, p. 33)

**“Do not come any closer,’ God said. ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.’”**



***“Take Thy Shoes From Off Thy Feet”  
by Domenico Fetti***

- To remain at a distance is a sign of reverence and respect in contrast to the intimacy of close proximity. The removal of footgear was similarly a sign of reverence. It denoted the acknowledgment that one stood in the presence of that which was pure and holy, in a place which must not be polluted by the world’s dust and dirt. The same command was issued when Joshua later stood before the Angel of the Lord: **“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy.’ And Joshua did so.”** (Joshua 5:15) In the Tabernacle and the Temple the priests performed their liturgical and sacrificial service barefoot. To this day, within Orthodox Judaism, the rabbi removes his footwear before pronouncing the priestly benediction in the synagogue service. Rabbinic tradition tells

us that shoes or sandals were not allowed anywhere on the Temple Mount in the days of the Second Temple. Throughout the Old Testament bare feet symbolized both humility and mortification (cf. 2 Samuel 15:30; Isaiah 20:2; Ezekiel 24:17,23). The Angel of the Lord explains that **“the place where you are standing is holy.”** The Hebrew word “*kadosh*” literally means “*to be set apart,*” thus “*to be sacred.*” That holiness is clearly not inherent in the place itself. This ground has become holy

because of God's presence here and will remain holy only so long as God remains.



*“Moses at the Burning Bush” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

## ***The Call of Moses***

### ***Exodus 3:7-10***

***Then He said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering, so I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey - the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perrizites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt.”***





*“Moses Before the Lord at Sinai” - Bible Engraving by Matthias Merian*

*“Then He said to him, ‘I am the God of your father...”* - The Angel of the Lord identified Himself as the one true God both in terms of a connection to Amram, Moses’ own father, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the three great patriarchs of the Israelite nation. By citing Amram, God reminded Moses of the faith of his family back in Egypt; the faith which had led them to risk their own lives to save the life of their son. The broader reference to the patriarchs provided the necessary link to the Messianic covenant which God had established with the descendants of Abraham and all of the promises which that covenant entailed. This was particularly important in defining the context for the deliverance which God was about to announce.

*“At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.”* - It is an awesome thing indeed for the creature to stand in the presence of the Creator. The sight of the holy God is a vision which no sinful man can bear. Moses’ reaction is both understandable and proper. So also the prophet Elijah veiled his face in the presence of the Almighty when he was summoned by the still, small voice of God: *“When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.”* (I Kings 19:12). Even the glorious angels of the presence, the resplendent seraphim which surround God’s heavenly throne, cover their faces

before Him by whom all things were made: ***“Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.”*** (Isaiah 6:2) The fear of which the text speaks - ***“he was afraid to look at God”*** - is this reverent awe of the creature before the Creator.

***“Then the Lord said, ‘I have indeed seen the misery of My people in Egypt.’”*** - The Lord begins with a review of the plight of the sons of Israel in Egypt in language very similar to that of the closing paragraph in the preceding chapter.

The same series of verbs emphasizes again both the intensity of their misery and of God’s resolve to intervene on their behalf. God declares that the people suffering in Egypt are ***“My people.”*** This is a most important declaration indicating God’s special love and concern for His covenant nation. He is completely aware of all that they have been forced to endure and He is prepared to act to deliver them from their harsh bondage.

***“The moment for action has arrived.”*** (Durham, p. 32) The language of the text is dramatically powerful: ***“So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians.”*** God has ***“come down”*** from His dwelling above

the highest heaven. He is not a distant deity, impotent and unaware. He knows what is happening and His power is now fully available to His people. God’s plan is simply ***“to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians.”*** The Hebrew verb in this phrase literally means ***“to snatch something out of the grasp of another.”*** God will stretch forth His own almighty hand to tear His people out of the grasp of Egypt’s power and dominion. This language carries the clear connotation of violent action on behalf of another, action which will destroy anything or anyone that stands in its way or opposes.



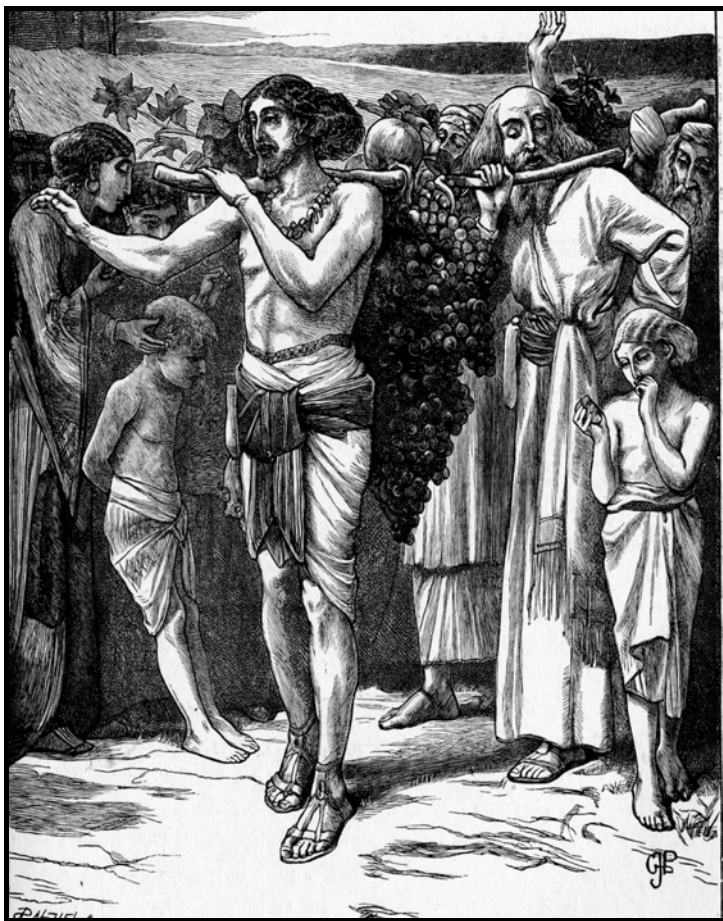
***“Serephim” Detail from “The Last Judgment”  
by Pietro Cavallini***



The implications of the terminology are ominous for Egypt.

***“And to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land...”*** - At the core of God’s promise of deliverance is the assurance that having rescued them from bondage in Egypt, He will bring them to a rich and abundant homeland of their own. Three consecutive phrases emphasize the bounty of the home which God has prepared for them without naming their destination. It is ***“a good and spacious land.”*** Later, in Deuteronomy, Moses more specifically defines the goodness of the Promised Land:

***“For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land - a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; and land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.”*** (Deuteronomy 8:6-9)



***“The Return of the Spies” by G. J. Pinwell***

In comparison to the cramped quarters of Goshen where Israel had been confined and oppressed, the Promised Land will indeed be ***“spacious”*** providing ample room for the nation to spread out and grow. It is also ***“a land flowing with milk and honey.”*** This phrase is the Old Testament’s favorite expression for the fertility of the Land of Canaan. When the spies returned from the tour of the country they enthusiastically reported: ***“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey!”*** (Numbers 13:27) The ***“milk”*** of the Israelite world was most often goat’s milk. A plentiful supply of milk signaled the presence of large flocks and verdant pastures,

the very image of prosperity in this nation of shepherds. **“Honey”** in the language of the Bible refers both to the sweet honey of wild bees and to the aromatic sugary syrup produced from dates which flourish throughout the land. In the third phrase God enumerates six of the Canaanite nations which presently occupied the land - **“the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.”** The listing is certainly not intended to be complete. In Genesis 15:19-21 ten nations are listed. Joshua enumerates thirty-one independent city-states co-existing within this relatively small country (Joshua 12). In this context, the point appears to be that the attractiveness of the land is demonstrated by the abundance of peoples who have chosen to dwell there.

**“And now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.”** - This summary statement reiterates the main point of the preceding introduction and prepares the way for the conclusion which will follow. God is prepared to act and the specific nature of that act will now be presented.

**“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people the Israelites out of Egypt.”** - The commission of Moses is introduced as the necessary conclusion and consequence of all that which has gone before - **“So now.”** Moses is called to be the agent through whom God will accomplish His purpose and carry out His plan. Everything that he will do, from this time forth, will be in the Name of God as the representative of God.



**“The Call of Moses” by Raphael**

## *Moses' Dialog With God*

### *Exodus 3:11-22*



*“Moses at the Burning Bush”  
by J. James Tissot*

*But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”*

*Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”*

*God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, appeared to me and said: I have*

*watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have*

*promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perrizites, Hivites and Jebusites - a land flowing with milk and honey.’ The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.’ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out My hand and strike the*



*Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go. And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”*

**“But Moses said to God...”** - The correct response to the divine commission would have been **“Here I am!”** (Hebrew - *“hinneni”* - cf. Genesis 22:1; 37:13). In English this Hebrew idiom could be paraphrased **“I am at your disposal, Lord.”** But Moses’ objection did not constitute a refusal of God’s call. Rather he expressed his own sense of personal unworthiness and inadequacy when confronted by the magnitude of that calling. The brash self-confident Moses of Egypt was gone. The man who stood before God at the burning bush was a man who had learned his own limitations the hard way. Numbers 12:3 notes - **“Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.”** That strong sense of personal humility can be clearly seen in his spontaneous declaration - **“Who am I that I should go.”** David had responded in the same way when King Saul offered him the hand of his daughter in marriage: **“Who am I, and what is my family or my father’s clan in Israel, that I should become the king’s son-in-law?”** (1 Samuel 18:18) King David later used exactly the same phrase to acknowledge his complete dependence upon God: **“Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?”** (2 Samuel 7:18) As he began his preparations for the building of the temple, Solomon humbly acknowledged his own unworthiness to undertake the task: **“Who then am I to build a temple for Him,**



**“Moses at the Burning Bush”**  
by J. James Tissot



*except as a place to burn sacrifices before Him?”* (2 Chronicles 2:6) A recognition of personal inadequacy and complete dependence upon God is not a bad starting point for a man who has been called to serve the Lord. This was the typical response of those whom God called to be His prophets. When God called Jeremiah, the reluctant prophet replied: *“Ah, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’”* God brushed aside his fears with the reminder that a prophet speaks by the power of God alone: *“But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 1:6-8) Isaiah was not qualified to serve as God’s prophet for as he himself acknowledged: *“I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.”* Only after God had cleansed him with the burning fire from His altar was Isaiah ready to declare: *“Here am I! Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:5,8) Amos freely admitted *“I was neither a prophet nor a prophet’s son, but I was a shepherd and*



*“The Prophet Jeremiah at the Fall of Jerusalem” by E. Bendemann*

*a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd and I also took care of sycamore fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'* (Amos 7:14-15) One who has received that divine summons cannot but obey - *"The Sovereign Lord has spoken, who can but prophesy?"* (Amos 3:8)

*"And God said, 'I will be with you and this will be the sign to you..."* - God did not rebuke Moses for his insecurity, but instead proceeded to reassure him and promise the divine power which the fulfillment of the task will require. *"Moses had just asked, 'Who am I to do all this?' Yahweh does not answer directly, but responds, as it were, 'The question is not who you are, but who I am, and I will be with you.'"* (Propp, p. 203) *"I will be with you"* - The accomplishment of this commission does not rest on Moses' shoulders. God Himself will do what must be done to deliver His people. William Propp rightly calls these words *"a ubiquitous formula of divine reassurance."* (Propp, p. 203) The phrase occurs nearly one hundred times throughout the Old Testament. God had spoken these same reassuring words before to Isaac - *"I will be with you and bless you."* (Genesis 26:3); and to Jacob - *"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go."* (Genesis 28:15); *"Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."* (Genesis 31:3).

*"And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you..."* - God provided Moses with a *"sign"* to corroborate and confirm his calling as the chosen deliverer.



*"The Call of Moses" by J.J. Sandart - 1641*



*“Moses Before the Burning Bush” by Rudolf Schäfer*

The fact that God had promised His presence to Moses made the mission’s successful outcome a certainty. The sign which He graciously provided was a prophecy of what would occur after Israel’s deliverance had been accomplished. The entire nation would come to worship the Lord at the very place where God had first appeared to Moses in the burning bush: ***“When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”*** John Durham explains the significance of God’s sign in this way:

*“God gives a sign in proof of His promised Presence with Moses: when he brings the people forth from Egypt, they shall all, together with Moses, serve Him at this very same mountain, this place of advent, call, and promise...What Moses has experienced here, Israel will experience here.”* (Durham, p. 33)

***“Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites...’*** - Moses remained hesitant. His next objection was that he was unqualified to be the deliverer because he did not know God’s Name - ***“Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His Name?’ Then what***

*shall I tell them?"* With these words, which modern readers often find perplexing, Moses is contending that he does know God well enough to represent Him as His deliverer. To speak as God's representative with God's authority required a level of intimacy with God and knowledge of God which Moses did not believe that he possessed. To use the modern idiom, we might say that they were not *"on a first name basis."*



*"Jehovah Appears to Moses at the Burning Bush" - Jost Amman, 1564*

*"God said to Moses, 'I Am Who I Am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'"* - This is a most profound moment in the story of God's relationship with His covenant people. In the ancient world names were extremely significant. Names had meaning. They were believed to express the identity and the essence of the individual who bore the name. Often, when a major life change took place, it was accompanied by a name change (i.e. *"Abram"* to *"Abraham"* (Genesis 17:5; *"Jacob"* to *"Israel"* Genesis 32:28). Thus, one did not reveal one's name casually. The disclosure of one's name was a sign of acceptance and trust. The





*“Saint Jerome” by Frederic Lord Leighton*

have a source. God is the source of everything else which exists. That is what it means to be God, and accordingly there can be only one God. Moses was instructed to inform the Israelites ***“I AM has sent me to you.”*** The Fourth Century Early Church father St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into the Latin language (*“The Vulgate”*) pondered the implications of God’s sacred Name and correctly concluded that eternity is an essential component of divinity:

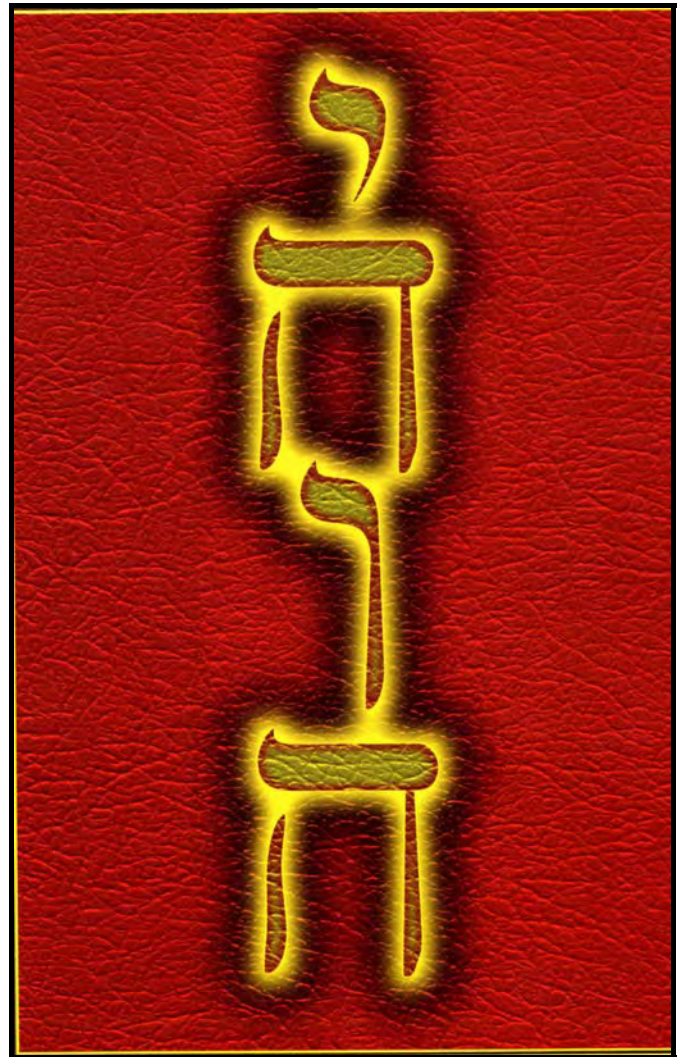
*“There is one nature of God and one only; and this, and this alone, truly is. For absolute being is derived from no other source, but is all its own. All things besides, that is all things created, although they appear to be, soon are not. For there was a time when they were not, and that which once was not may again cease to be. God alone, who is eternal, that is to say, who has no beginning, really deserves to be called an essence. Therefore also He says of Him, ‘I Am has sent me.’”* (Lienhardt, p. 20)

sacred Name which God pronounced to Moses revealed the essence of His nature. It was the same name by which He had made Himself known to Abraham at the critical moment when the covenant was first established: ***“I am the Lord (“Jahweh”) who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”*** (Genesis 15:7). The repetition of the divine Name here at the burning bush served to link the two episodes together as crucial moments in God’s covenant with His people. God’s name tells us what it means to be God. The name defines the Being who bears the name, to the extent that He condescends to reveal Himself to His people. ***“I Am Who I Am”*** - that is to say, God is the only independent existence. God does

And yet, there is, at the same time, a deliberate lack of definition in that which God reveals about Himself. Thereby God reminds the creature not to overstep his bounds and presume to comprehend or limit the Creator. J.C. Connell explains:

*“I AM THAT I AM” signifies that He is self-existent, the only real being and the source of all reality; that He is self-sufficient, that He is eternal and unchangeable in His promises; that He is what He will be, all choice being according to His own will and pleasure. In addition, the name preserves much of His nature hidden from curious and presumptuous inquiry. We cannot by searching find Him out..” (Rushdooney, p. 38)*

The Hebrew word translated as **“I AM”** is *“Jahweh.”* - sometimes called the sacred *“tetragrammaton”* (four letters) from the four consonants which comprise the term in the Hebrew text. Among the Jews it was believed that the name of God was too holy and exalted to be pronounced by human lips so that by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C., when the Masoretes added vowel points to the consonants of the Hebrew Old Testament, the vowels of the noun *“adonai”* (*“Lord”*) were combined with the consonants of *“Jahweh”* to form the hybrid title *“Jehovah.”* This combination made it possible to refer to God without uttering His sacred name. *“Jahweh”* is the divine name used most frequently in the Old Testament. It appears more than 6,800 times. Unfortunately most English translations have followed the precedent of the Hebrew Masoretes, and have obscured the meaning of this most profound name by simply translating it as *“the Lord.”*



*“The Tetragrammaton”*



***“God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your Fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.’”*** The second part of Jahweh’s response to Moses’ question ***“Then what shall I tell them?”*** is both a reaffirmation of His identity as the covenant God of the patriarchs and the authority of Moses as His representative - ***“The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has sent me to you.”*** The basic sentence is ***“Jahweh has sent me to you.”*** The identifying phrases, ***“the God of your fathers...”*** are inserted between the subject and its verb and object to place the message in its historical context. The message is clearly that Moses’ mission of deliverance is the manner in which God is fulfilling the covenant promises which He had made to the patriarchs. Cassutto paraphrases the powerful message of these words in this way: ***“He Himself sent me to you; although we forgot His Name, He did not forget us. He remembered His covenant with our ancestors, and has sent me to you to fulfill His covenant.”*** (Cassutto, p. 39)



***“Moses at the Burning Bush” by Jacobo Vignali - 1640***

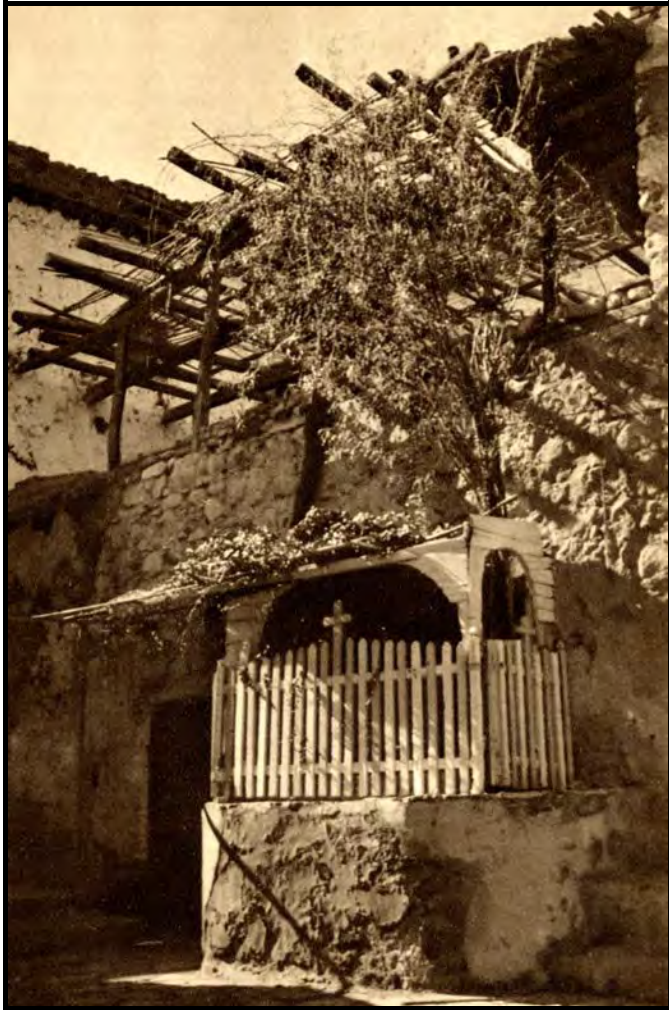


*“The Call of Moses” Woodcut form the “Koberg Bible -1498*

***“This is My Name forever, the Name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.”*** - Unlike capricious, unreliable men, God does not and cannot change. His unvarying dependability provides the assurance that all of His promises will stand forever and will be perfectly fulfilled. Jahweh had graciously bestowed upon Moses and the Children of Israel the covenant Name by which He deigned to be known. In the Hebrew text of the phrase, two nouns - “*sem*” (“*name*”) and “*zekher*” (“*remembrance*”) - parallel one another. The former is the objective manifestation of God’s nature in the name by which He has revealed Himself and the later is the subjective recognition of that which God has revealed on the part of man. A similar combination occurs in Psalm 135:13 - ***Your name, O Lord (“Jahweh”) endures forever, Your renown (“remembrance”) throughout all generations.*** (cf. Psalm 102:13) The words “***from generation to generation***” are a Hebrew idiom which signals “*uninterrupted continuance and boundless duration.*” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 339)

***“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers...’*** - Moses was instructed that upon his arrival in Egypt he was to call together “***the elders of Israel.***” These “***elders***” (Hebrew - “*zekenim*”) are the representatives of the twelve tribes, the patriarchs of the various clans within the





*“The Shrine of the Burning Bush in the Monastery of St. Catherine” -1932*

tribes. *“The term itself originated in tribal societies where advanced age and rich experience in life were valued assets that qualified one for leadership. In the course of time, the term lost its primary meaning, and evolved into a title of a holder of office, an official representative.”* (Sarna, II, p., 53) Before he would be able to lead the people it would be essential to win the confidence and support of these tribal leaders. Recent archaeological discoveries have indicated that among the Semitic tribes of this era *“the council of elders was entrusted with considerable authority, judicial and political. Its members acted as the spokesmen and the delegates of the tribes in dealings with the urban administration.”* (Sarna, p. 18)

Moses was instructed to inform them of the fact that God had appeared to him and commissioned him to announce God’s intent to deliver them from bondage in Egypt and lead them

out to the Promised Land: *“Say to them, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perrizites, Hivites, and Jebusites - a land flowing with milk and honey.’”* The language of his message to the elders reflects, with minor variation, that of the original theophany in the preceding paragraphs. In this instance, God deliberately used the same language - *“I have watched over you”* (literally - *“I have taken note of you”*) and *“I have promised to bring you up out of ..Egypt”* - which had previously been used by the patriarch Joseph in his dying words to his brothers: *“I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid (literally - “God will take note of you”) and take you up out of this land to the land He*

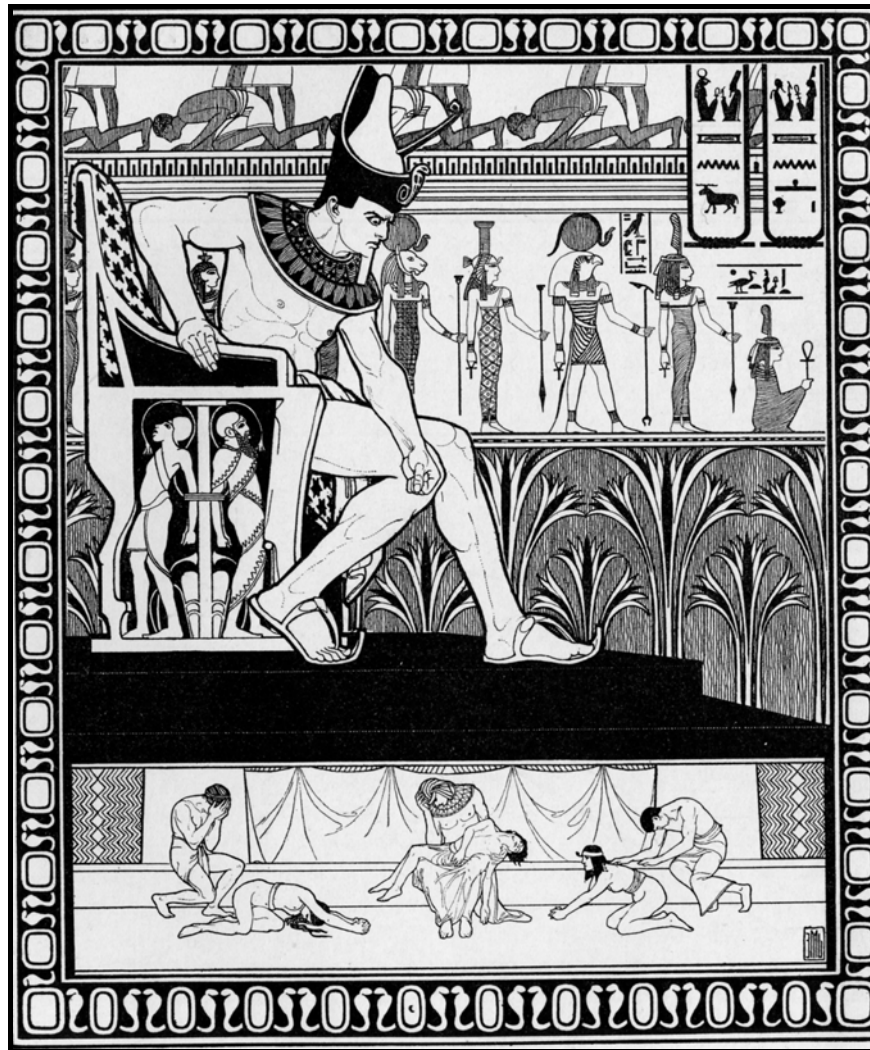
*promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*” (Genesis 50:24). By this repetition of the historic language of the promise, the elders of Israel would be enabled to recognize that the time of the long awaited deliverance which God had promised to their fathers had finally arrived.

*“The elders of Israel will listen to you.”* - God assured Moses that the elders would receive his message favorably and accept his leadership as the agent through whom their deliverance would be accomplished. They, as the representatives of the people, would then accompany him to his audience before the King of Egypt, thereby indicating to Pharaoh that Moses was their spokesman.

*“The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.”* The message which Moses was instructed to present to the King was that *“the Lord, the God of the Hebrews has met with us.”* In this message to Pharaoh, Jahweh identified Himself in a manner which the heathen ruler of Egypt could recognize and understand. The references to the covenant and the patriarchs which had characterized the earlier conversations with Moses and the elders are gone. They would have meant nothing to the Egyptian ruler. Instead, Jahweh simply refers to Himself as *“the Lord, the God of the Hebrews.”* Pharaoh’s world view was most familiar with the concept that every people had their own gods and goddesses. It would then have come as no surprise to the king that his Hebrew slaves had a deity of their own. The *“Hebrews”* is the somewhat derogatory



*“Moses Before God at the Burning Bush”  
by Fra Eustachio*



*Pharaoh” by E.M. Lilien*

term which the Egyptians characteristically used to identify their Semitic slaves. Moses and the elders were to announce to Pharaoh that their God *“has met with us.”* The verb in this phrase refers to a sudden and unexpected encounter with the divine. It is the term ordinarily used in ancient cultures for a theophany, that is, a visual appearance and revelation by one of the gods. Again, the message has been adapted to ordinary language and expectations of the pagan world. The command which Moses and the elders had received through this encounter with their God was that they were to undertake a special three day pilgrimage into the desert to offer sacrifices to Him. The request for a three day religious holiday, in contrast to the permanent liberation of the Hebrew slaves which is God’s true purpose, has elicited considerable discussion among the commentators. Was God deliberately deceiving Pharaoh by suggesting that all He required was a brief furlough after which the Hebrews would



return to their labors? Was this the same kind of dishonest dealing which typically characterizes human negotiations? All such suggestions are, of course, blasphemous denials of the perfect righteousness and holiness of Almighty God. The manner of God's approach to the King of Egypt was actually a demonstration of His gracious mercy to a stubborn prideful sinner. This most eminently reasonable request was designed to make it as easy as possible for Pharaoh to comply and thus avoid the devastating judgement which was to come upon him and his kingdom as punishment for his defiance. God is not playing games here. This proposal is real. St. Augustine notes that if Pharaoh had yielded to this request, Israel would not have gone beyond it at this time. Instead, they would have gone out on their pilgrimage and returned to Egypt. The King would then have been led, step by patient step, to a point at which he would ultimately have been willing to grant the Israelites their freedom. *“And if he had rendered obedience to the will of God in the smaller, God would have given him strength to be faithful in the greater.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 340) Thus has the Lord always dealt with sinful mankind. Alfred Edersheim explained God's awesome grace to Pharaoh in this way:

*“The same almost excess of regard for Pharaoh prompted that at the first only so moderate a demand should be made upon him. It was infinite condescension to Pharaoh's weakness, on the part of God, not to insist from the first upon the immediate and entire dismissal of Israel. Less could not have been asked than was demanded of Pharaoh, nor could obedience have been made more easy. Only the most tyrannical determination to crush the rights and convictions of the people, and the most daring defiance of Jehovah, could have prompted him to refuse such a request, and that in the face of all the signs and wonders by which the mission of Moses was accredited.”* (Edersheim, p. 53)

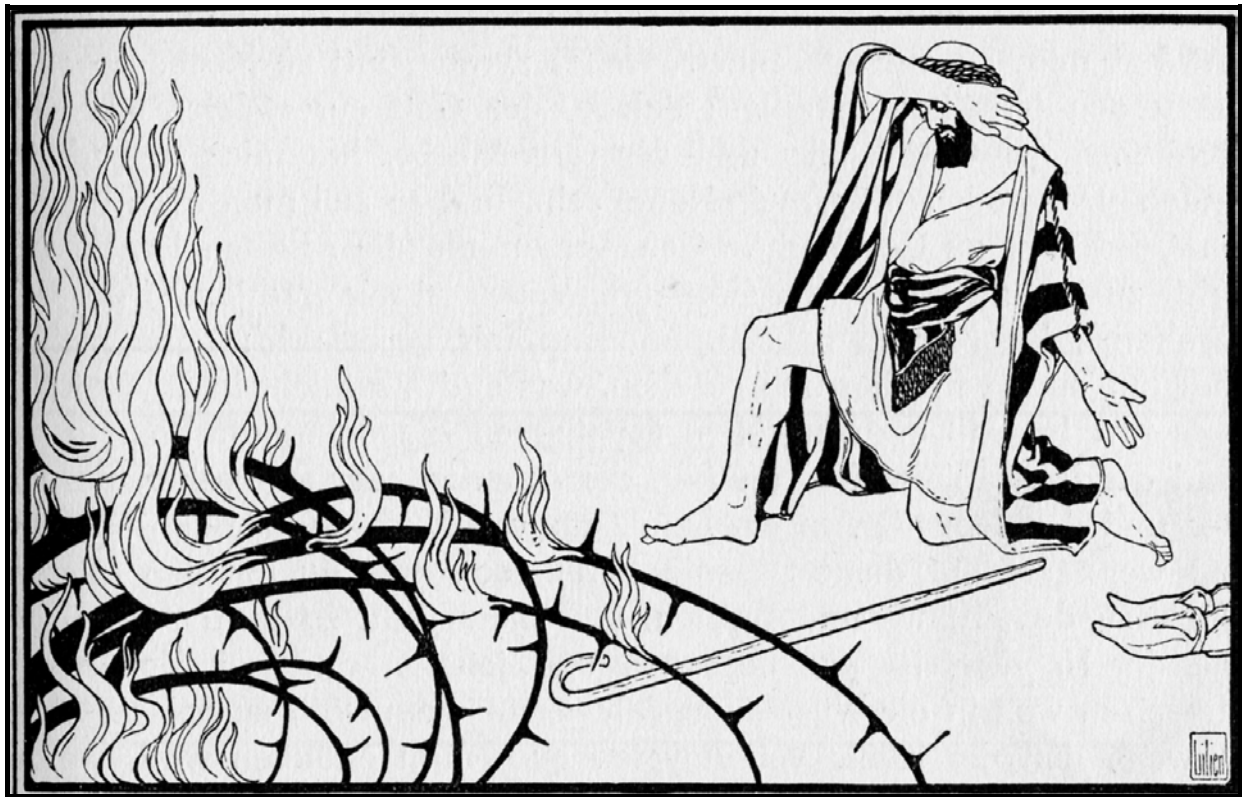
In fact, the request which Moses brought before the King was not only reasonable, it was routine. Egyptian historical records have revealed that it was not at all uncommon for slaves to be allowed time off in order to conduct pilgrimages or to worship their various gods. The fact that Pharaoh would so adamantly reject this ordinary request would serve to clearly signal his state of mind.

***“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.”*** - The outcome of all this is already known to God, who declared through His prophet Isaiah: ***“I am God and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times what is still to***

*come.*” (Isaiah 46:10) In that divine omniscience, Pharaoh’s sinful stubbornness becomes an opportunity to display the perfect justice of God.

*“But to enable the world to learn the moral of these events, it is essential that the heart and mind of the king should be laid bare for all to see. His refusal would clearly prove that he persists in his stubbornness and that he is absolutely determined to keep the heavy yoke of bondage on the necks of the Israelites permanently and incessantly. Thereby shall God’s judgment be vindicated.”* (Cassutto, p. 43)

***“Unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out My hand and strike the Egyptians...”*** - The opposition of the king notwithstanding, God assured Moses that



*“Moses Before the Burning Bush” by E.M. Lilien*

He would indeed accomplish the liberation of His people. Pharaoh may have been the most powerful man on earth, but he was only a man. But a mere man, no matter how powerful he may be, cannot stand against the ***“mighty hand”*** of God. There was

no force on earth which could humble the king of great Egypt and compel him to act against his own will. Therefore God declared that He would directly intervene in this matter Himself - ***“So I will stretch out My hand and strike the Egyptians...”***. The language of the text is powerfully dramatic with the clear connotation of violence and destruction. In Verse 8, God had pictured the strength of Egypt’s control over her slaves as Israel being held in ***“the hand of the Egyptians.”*** (3:8). Now the same language is used to announce that the ***“hand”*** of God will ***“strike the Egyptians”*** to liberate His people from their bondage. The righteous judgement of God will come crashing down upon Egypt like a mighty fist.

***“With all the wonders that I will perform among them. And after that he will let you go.”*** - The word ***“wonders”*** is characteristically used in the Old Testament in reference to the miraculous intervention of God in human affairs to demonstrate His power and accomplish His purpose. So the Psalmist rejoices: ***“Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever. He has caused His wonders to be remembered.”*** (Psalm 111:2-4) In this instance, the reference is to the ten plagues which the Lord will send upon the land of Egypt. In order to clearly demonstrate the helpless impotence of Egypt’s ***“god-king,”*** these miraculous signs will be accomplished within the heart of Pharaoh’s own kingdom: ***“all the wonders that I will perform among them.”*** The English translation - ***“After that he will let you go”*** - fails to reflect the intensity of the original text which literally declares - ***“After that he will compel you to go.”*** ***“And the result of this display of power will be not just the desired permission: the Pharaoh will ‘drive’ or ‘hurl’ them out in his eagerness to be rid of them and their god.”*** (Durham, p. 40)



***“Moses at the Burning Bush”  
6<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine Icon***



***“And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed.”*** - Many years earlier God had promised father Abraham:

***“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.’”*** (Genesis 15:13-14)

Now that promise was about to be fulfilled. God told Moses that not only would Pharaoh agree to liberate the Israelites from their slavery, but the people of Egypt



***“God’s Covenant with Abraham”  
by J. James Tissot***

would be so eager to have them go that they would gladly offer them their proper compensation for generations of hard labor. This was in keeping with the most basic principles of justice, as would later be illustrated by the Mosaic Law governing the freeing of a slave: ***“And when you release him, do not send him away empty-handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor and your wine press. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.”*** (Deuteronomy 15:13-15) Umberto Cassutto argues that it is precisely this basic principle of divine justice which required fair compensation of the laborer for his labor which is being applied in this matter:

***“They were entitled to***

*liberation, and upon liberation, the bounty was also due to them. This was required by law - that is, absolute justice demanded it - and although no earthly court could compel the king of Egypt and his servants to fulfill their obligation, the Heavenly Court saw to it that the requirements of law and justice were carried out, and directed the course of events to this end.”* (Cassutto, p. 44)

**“Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”** - The instruction indicates the eagerness which the Egyptian people will feel for the quick departure of the Hebrew slaves. The consequences of the battle of wills which had been going on in the royal palace will have been felt throughout the land. The preceding verse had indicated that Pharaoh would finally “hurl” the Israelites out of his country. That same sense of desperate urgency will be felt by the entire population. The women of the household were the custodians of the family’s wealth in the ancient Near East.

*“A man converted his monetary wealth into gems, gold, and silver, and these were in the form of ornaments to be worn by his wife. Thus, even the wives of tradesmen and peasants would often be richly ornamented...Thus, when the Hebrew women asked the Egyptian women for an indemnity, they were going to the actual possessors of Egyptian wealth.”* (Rushdooney, p. 42)

Moses summarizes the significance of this action using the language of a successful military campaign - **“And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”** As will be observed in the chapters to come, the ten plagues are in reality a test of strength between Egypt and her gods and Israel and her God. When Pharaoh, the living god of Egypt, is finally forced to yield to the God of Moses and his people, the battle has been won. Accordingly, with these words God is promising Moses that when the Israelites leave Egypt they will go forth like a victorious army. Edersheim correctly asserts: *“The terror of Israel had fallen upon them, and instead of leaving Egypt as fugitives, they marched out like a triumphant host, carrying with them the ‘spoils’ of their divinely conquered enemies.”* (Edersheim, p. 54) The Psalmist later celebrated the sweet memory of this great victory: **“He brought Israel out, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered. Egypt was glad when they left, because the dread of Israel had fallen on them.”** (Psalm 105:37-38)



*Moses' Staff Transformed into a Serpent" - 15<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible Woodcut  
"God Changed the Wooden Staff of Moses into a Serpent,  
Of Which this Man Was at First Anxious and Afraid.  
The Almighty Hand of the Most High Accomplishes Many Miracles,  
Which Without a Fearful Heart One Cannot Perceive."*

## *Signs For Moses*

### *Exodus 4:1-17*

*Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'?" Then the Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the Lord said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. "This," said the Lord, "is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has appeared to you." Then the Lord said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow. "Now, put it back into*



*your cloak,” He said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh. Then the Lord said, “If they do not believe you, or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs of listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.” Moses said to the Lord, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” The Lord said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I will help you speak and teach you what to say.’ But Moses said, “O Lord, please sent someone else to do it.” Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and He said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you and his heart will be glad when he sees you. You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. But take this staff in your hand, so that you can perform miraculous signs with it.”*

*“Moses answered, ‘What if they do not believe me...’” - Moses continued to find it impossible to believe that he could serve as the chosen deliverer. His greatest concern was that he would be rejected of his own people. This is actually the third objection which the reluctant prophet has raised. First he had said - “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.” (3:11) When God brushed that*



*“Moses’ Staff Transformed Into a Serpent”  
by J. James Tissot*

objection aside with the reminder that this about God Himself not His messenger, Moses next excuse was that he did not know God's name (3:13). God had then revealed His sacred Name. Now, for the third time, Moses attempted to evade God's call in this instance by raising the possibility that the people would not accept him as God's representative. However, these words represent a significant escalation in the reluctant prophet's resistance for God had previously assured Moses that the elders of Israel would not only heed his words but would also stand by his side before Pharaoh (cf. 3:18). It is not an exaggeration to label this objection "*an explicit contradiction of God's Word, a denial of divine revelation...the height of impertinence.*" (Ryken, p. 108) Nonetheless, the Lord continued to patiently reassure Moses. He dealt with this objection by providing Moses with three miraculous signs to authenticate his message.

The Bible takes a unusually cautious approach to the use of miraculous signs and wonders. In Deuteronomy 13:1-3, Moses warned the people that a prophet must be judged on the content of his message, not merely his ability to work impressive miracles:



*"Saul and the Witch of Endor"*

*"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love Him with all your heart and with all your soul."*

The devil too can work miracles and, in fact, Scripture warns that

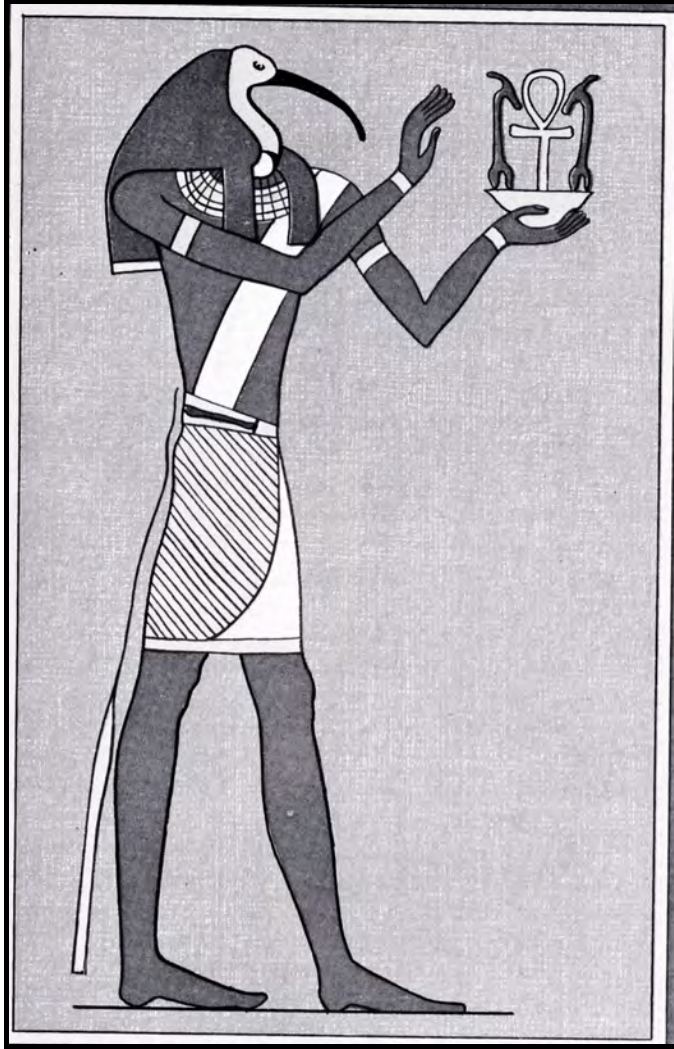


*“Egyptian Priests Within A Temple of Osiris on the Isle of Philae”*

the nefarious work of Satan will frequently be accompanied by **“all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.”** (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; cf. Revelation 13:13). The Christian must be wary lest the glitz and the glitter of Satan’s pseudo-wonders succeed in distracting him from the deadly falsehood of the message which they serve.

At the same time, the text is meticulously careful to distinguish the wondrous signs bestowed upon Moses from the ritual magic commonplace in both the ancient and the modern worlds. The practice of magic is predicated on the belief that supernatural power can be controlled or manipulated by a magician who can invoke the magic words of a spell or incantation or who possesses and knows how to use the magic talisman. *“Magic was a pervasive ingredient in everyday life in Egypt, deeply imbedded in the culture.”* (Sarna, p. 20) Moreover, magic played a particularly prominent role in the religion of ancient Egypt. Within the pantheon of ancient Egypt’s gods, *“Thoth,”* depicted with the body of a man and the head of the sacred





***“Thoth - the Patron God of Egyptian Magic”***

ibis, was worshiped as the Creator of the world and the patron god of magic. Thoth was the custodian of divine wisdom who was able to “*teach a man not only the words of power, but also the manner in which to utter them*” so that they might have the desired supernatural effect. (Budge, 1, p. 408) Gören Larsson asserts that the priests of Egypt’s great temples were essentially master magicians and it is in this context that the demands of Moses were initially viewed by Pharaoh as a challenge to the priest/magicians of the royal court (i.e. 7:11-12):

*“Magic was a main element in the Egyptian religion at this time, and those who mastered these powers were held in high esteem. The priests, belonging to the highest officials of Pharaoh, possessed secret knowledge and were skilled in all sorts of mysterious rites. By casting spells, they could allegedly overpower humans and control gods*

*and thereby attain dominion over the world of nature and the world of the gods, realms which could not be separated since some animals were regarded as divine. Through magical formulas, the magicians claimed to exercise the power of the gods. The master of magic, therefore, became a player in the world of the gods.”* (Larsson, p. 35)

Hebrew scholar Nahum Sarna agrees that ancient Egypt was “*the classic land of magic*” as the result of her multiplicity of god and goddesses, none of which were infinite or absolute. Sarna explains:

*“Egypt, especially, was the classic land of magic, which played a central*

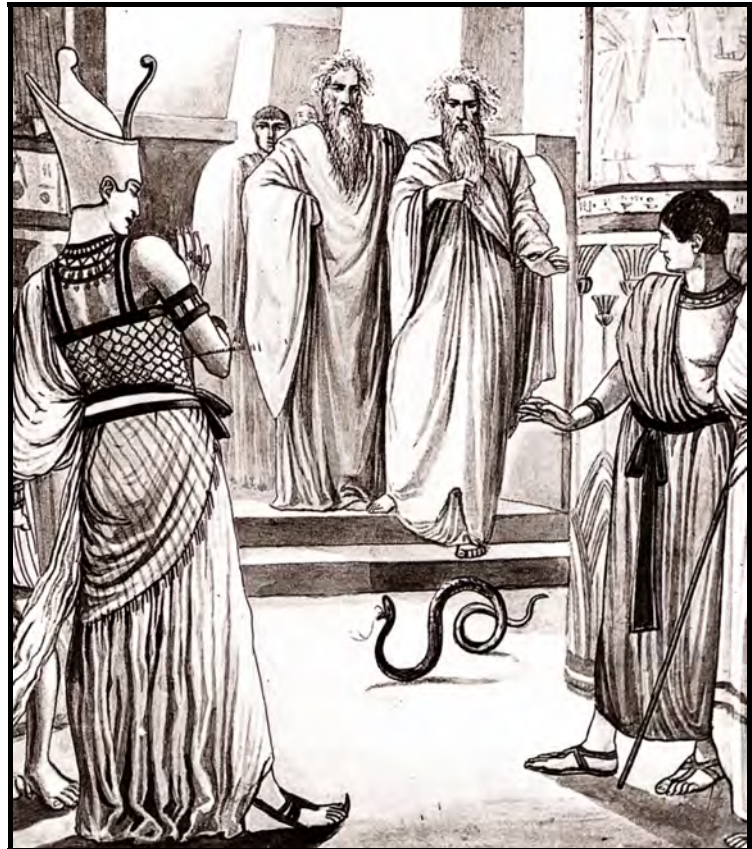


*role in its religious life. In fact, magic permeated every aspect of life. The number of gods in Egypt was almost unlimited...Man had to be able to devise the means whereby those powers inherent in the meta-divine realm could be activated for his benefit. Magic thus became an integral part of religion. Even the gods were believed to resort to magic against one another. The magician was an important, indeed an indispensable, religious functionary. He possessed the expertise necessary for the manipulation of the mysterious powers. These skills included the spoken word such as spells and utterances, the use of magical objects such as charms and amulets, and ritual practices.” (Sarna, 2, p. 58)*

The Israelite recognition of the true God as the sovereign Master of the Universe precluded the possibility of magic. No mere creature could manipulate or control the Creator. *“In Egypt, the magician manipulates the divine; in Israel it is the one God who controls both man and nature.” (Sarna, 2, p. 59)*

There is no hint of magical nonsense here. The Bible makes it unmistakably clear that the power does not reside within Moses or anything he does. God remains in absolute control as both the instigator and the implementor of these miracles.

*“Moses, however, is not a magician. He possesses no superhuman powers and no esoteric knowledge; he is unable to initiate or perform anything except by precise instructions from God; he pronounces no spells, observes no rituals, and employs no occult techniques, and often he does not know in advance the consequences of the actions he is told to perform.” (Sarna, p. 20)*



***“Moses Confronts Pharaoh and His Priest Magicians” -  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration***

*“Then the Lord said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’”* - “God’s inquiry is obviously not for purposes of identification. Rather it is designed to emphasize both for Moses and the reader that the stick in his hand is an ordinary shepherd’s staff, not some magical amulet endowed with supernatural power of its own. Moses’ matter-of-



*“The Golden Death Mask of Pharaoh Tutankhamun” Displaying the Cobra and the Vulture in His Royal Crown*

fact response - “***A staff, he replied.***” - suggests that he was somewhat befuddled by the question. But through this ordinary shepherd’s crook, the tool which Moses had used to guard and guide the flocks of Jethro (cf. Psalm 23:4), God would perform great miracles - “***But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it.***” (Exodus 4:17) That which had been the ordinary crook of Moses the shepherd would be transformed into “***the staff of God.***” (Exodus 4:20) Louis Ginzberg reports that among the Midrash, the verbal traditions and legends of the rabbis, the staff of Moses had accumulated an illustrious history. It became a magnificent sapphire scepter that had been with the chosen leaders of God’s people since the dawn of time:

*“It is the rod that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the twilight of the first Sabbath eve, and gave to Adam. He transmitted it to Enoch, from him it descended to Noah, then to Shem, and Abraham, Isaac, and finally to Jacob, who brought it with him and gave it to his son Joseph. When Joseph died, the Egyptians pillaged his house and the rod, which was in their booty, they brought to Pharaoh’s palace. On this rod the ineffable Name is graven, and also the ten plagues that God will cause to visit the Egyptians in a future day.”* (Ginzberg, 292)

Jethro had stolen the magical sapphire staff from Pharaoh and it had sprouted and taken root within his garden. Any man who asked to for the hand of one of his daughters in marriage was challenged to try to uproot the staff. Moses was the first to successfully do so. All the others died in the attempt. But all of this colorful embellishment is without a hint of support in the Biblical text and , in fact, contradicts the Bible’s emphasis on the ordinary nature of the staff. Now, without any explanation, the Lord commanded Moses - “***Throw it on the ground.***” The result was astonishing: “***Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake.***” The transformation of the staff into a writhing serpent is replete with symbolic significance in the impending conflict between Moses and Pharaoh. The figure of a rearing cobra, its hood spread wide in deadly menace, is a pervasive image throughout Egyptian mythology. The “*uraeus,*” as this image came to be known - based on Egyptian words which mean “*she who rears up*” - also represented the all seeing fiery eye of “*Ra,*” the powerful sun god. The cobra was the symbol of “*Wadjet,*” the serpent goddess of Lower Egypt. On the royal crown of the Pharaoh the cobra was combined with the head of Nekhebet, the vulture, which represented Upper Egypt, thereby identifying Pharaoh as the Lord of the Two Lands. Wadjet was the protector of the



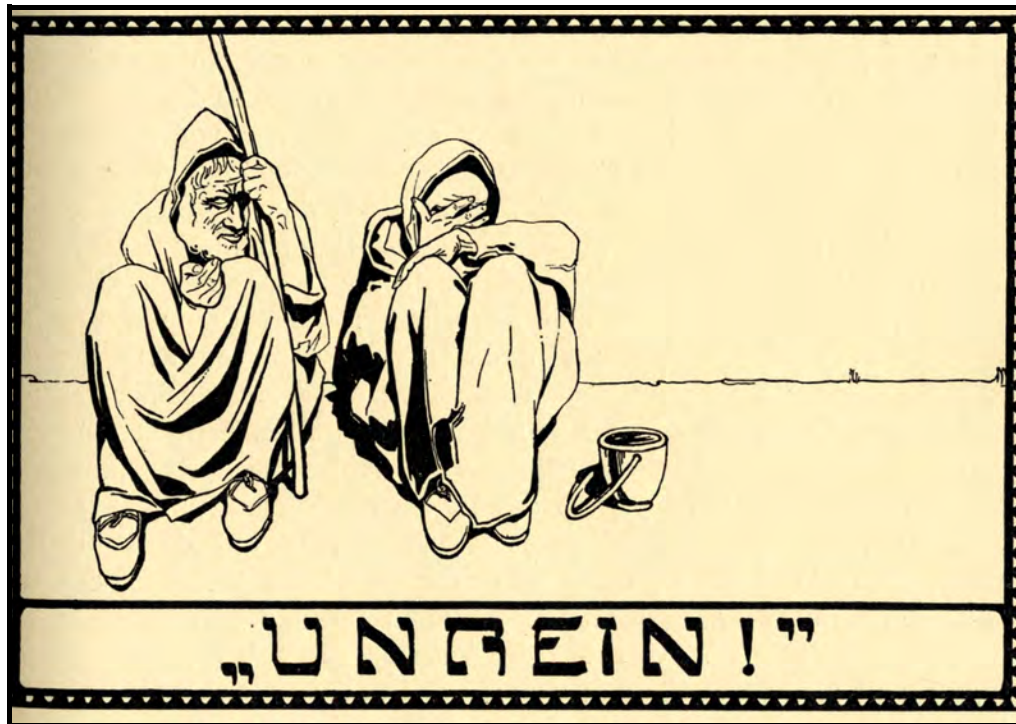
Pharaoh, ready to strike and kill any who would dare to oppose him. Larsson describes the relevance of the transformation of Moses' staff into a serpent in this way:

*“The cobra represented in particular the national god of lower Egypt and was the foremost symbol of Pharaoh, reflecting his claim to divine royalty, sovereignty, and power. Therefore, it constantly appears on his crown or helmet, as depicted in reliefs, paintings, and statues. His scepter is often a stylized cobra. Even the Egyptian gods are frequently depicted with a scepter in the form of a snake. We are safe in concluding that the transformation of the rod to a snake is a sign aimed precisely at the very symbol of the Pharaoh’s alleged power. It demonstrates so clearly who is the true King and God.”* (Larsson, p. 36)

The menacing nature of the serpent is clearly indicated by Moses' response - **“and he ran from it.”** Not only did the prophet have no idea of what would happen when God commanded him to throw down his staff, he was terrified by the evidently venomous snake now writhing at his feet. But God ignored Moses' fear and commanded him to pick up the serpent in the most dangerous way possible - **“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Reach out your hand and take it by the tail.’”** Ordinarily, the prudent way to handle a poisonous snake is to grasp it carefully, right behind its head so that it cannot turn back and strike. However, God's instruction to Moses is specific - **“Take it by the tail.”** To his credit, Moses does not equivocate or hesitate, but simply obeys the divine command - **“So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake.”** What would usually have been a foolhardy, self-destructive action becomes completely safe as by the power of God the serpent is transformed back into his familiar staff - **“and it turned back into a staff in his hand.”** The first of the three signs from God had conveyed a clear message about the nature and the outcome of the mission to which Moses had been called by God:

*“At God’s command, Moses next seized this serpent, when it became once more in his hand the staff with which he led his flock - only now that flock was Israel, and the shepherd’s staff the wonder working ‘rod of God.’ In short the humble shepherd who would have fled from Pharaoh, should, through divine strength overcome all the might of Egypt.”* (Edersheim, p. 51)

**“‘This,’ said the Lord, ‘is so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers - the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob - has**



*“Unclean - The Leper’s Cry” by E.M. Lilien*

*appeared to you.”* - God reassures Moses that with the ability to perform this miraculous sign as an authentication of his message the people will accept him as a genuine messenger of God. God’s words reflect the language of Moses’ original objection with the addition of the covenant language - *“the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”* Without allowing for further objection from Moses, the Lord proceeded to provide a second sign.

*“Then the Lord said to him, ‘Put your hand inside your cloak.’ So Moses put his hand into his cloak...”* - Moses was commanded to place his hand *“inside his cloak”* (literally - *“upon his chest”*). When he withdrew his hand he was no doubt horrified to note that it had been afflicted with a disfiguring skin disease identified in most English translations as leprosy. The Hebrew nouns actually refer to a broad category of skin ailments and afflictions all of which caused catastrophic disruption of the skin’s surface with encrustation, swelling, and flaking. It is difficult for modern man to imagine the fear and revulsion these diseases provoked among the people of the Biblical world. They were linked to the judgement of God and resulted in total exclusion from social contact and religious ceremony (cf. Leviticus 13 & 14; Numbers 12:10; Deuteronomy 24:8-9; 2 Kings 5:19-27; 15:4-5; 2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

*“It is this religious connotation of the ‘sarahat’ skin disorders, and the fact that they and the opprobrium of judgement they carried were potentially infectious upon the slightest, even secondary, tactile contact, that made them so fearful. The infected person was pronounced unclean and his uncleanness was considered so contagious that he was required to identify himself by dress and by cry and to dwell in seclusion (Leviticus 13:45-46).” (Durham, p. 45)*



*“Jesus Heals the Ten Lepers” by J. James Tissot*

*“Now put it back in your cloak,’ He said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.” - God’s command that Moses place his infected hand back onto his chest, like the preceding command to grasp the snake by its tail, was a test of faith. Under normal circumstances, an Israelite would have recoiled from any contact with the unclean flesh for fear of further infection. In this instance, the revulsion would have been all the more intense because he had been told to place his infected hand upon his chest, directly over his heart. But, to his credit, Moses did not hesitate. He placed the corrupted skin over his heart, and the hand was restored.*

Given the fact that this type of affliction was often linked to divine judgement upon



the sinner, its appearance here may well have been intended as a warning to Moses that God's patience with his recalcitrance was nearing its end. Rabbinic tradition teaches that the corruption of Moses' hand was both a punishment for his own unbelief and a symbol of the spiritual corruption to which the Children of Israel had been exposed during their years in Egypt. *"The nation was like a leper, who defiled everyone that touched him. The leprosy represented...the impurity of Egypt in which Israel was sunken."* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 344) Dr. Louis Ginzberg summarized the understanding of Israel's historic teachers in this way:

*"The Lord now bade Moses put his hand in his bosom and take it out again, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. And God bade him put his hand into his bosom again, and it turned again as his other flesh. Besides being a chastisement for his hasty words, the plague on his hand was to teach him that as the leper defiles, so the Egyptians defiled Israel, and as Moses was healed of his uncleanness, so God would cleanse the Children of Israel of the pollution which the Egyptians had brought upon them."* (Ginzberg, p. 321)

Moses may have had the memory of that leprous hand upon his heart in mind when he later used the same language to lament the spiritual unresponsiveness of the Israelites and the heavy burden of leadership which God had placed upon him as their deliverer:

*"So Moses said to the Lord, 'Why hast Thou been so hard on Thy servant? And why have I not found favor in Thy sight, that Thou hast laid the burden of all this people upon me? Was it I who conceived all these people? Was it I who brought them forth, that Thou shouldst say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which Thou didst swear to their fathers?'"*  
(Numbers 11:11-12)

The miraculous restoration of Moses' stricken hand - *"restored, like the rest of his flesh"* - conveyed a message of empowerment and hope. God would equip Moses to cleanse and heal the nation of its corruption and restore its identity as His chosen people. *"The object of the first miracle was to exhibit Moses as the man whom Jehovah had called to be the leader of His people; that of the second, to show that, as the messenger of Jehovah, he was furnished with the necessary power of the execution*

*of his calling.*” (Keil/Delitsch, p. 344) The second sign exhibited the power which God was bestowing upon Moses both to inflict and remove the most severe judgments of God. Like its predecessor, this sign would serve to accredit Moses before the people as a genuine prophet of God.

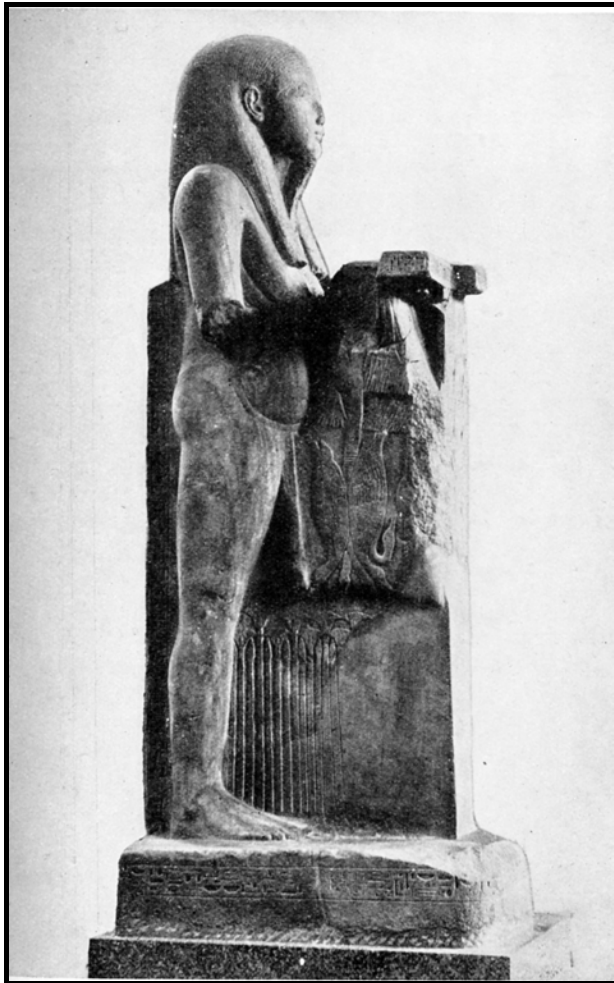
***“Then the Lord said, ‘If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second.’”*** - The Lord continued to patiently lead Moses along, encouraging him and strengthening his confidence that God would equip him to carry out the task he had been assigned. Once again, the language which God uses here to describe the people’s positive response to the second sign is the same language which Moses had used earlier to express his own fears of rejection (cf. 4:1)

***“But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become***



***“The Idols of Egypt” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration***

***blood on the ground.***” - With the last of the three miraculous signs God will demonstrate to the Children of Israel that as His representative Moses will have the



***“Hapi” the Egyptian God of the Nile***

power and authority to confront and overcome the false gods of mighty Egypt. The Egyptians worshiped the sacred Nile as the divine source and giver of life. This final certification sign for Israel will be repeated and extended as the first of the judgment signs upon Egypt when not only the water which is poured out but all the water of Egypt will be transformed into blood.

The signs which the Lord had provided effectively removed any basis for Moses’ concern that he would not be acknowledged or accepted by the Children of Israel. The power which they revealed would convince even the most dubious that Moses was the deliverer whom God had promised. The reluctant prophet was compelled to contrive yet another argument to evade the call of the Lord.

***“Moses said to the Lord, ‘O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since You have spoken to Your***

***servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.***” - Despite everything which he had heard and seen, Moses remained unwilling to undertake the task which God had set for him. Having failed in his attempt to argue that the Israelites would not accept him, he shifts the focus to his own self-perceived inabilities - ***“O Lord, I have never been eloquent...”*** His objection literally says ***“I am not a man of words.”*** A sense of inadequacy before the awesome call of God was not unusual among those whom God chose as His leaders. Gideon reminded the Lord: ***“‘But Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’*** (Judges 6:15) The prophet Isaiah lamented: ***“Woe to me! I am ruined! For***



***I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!”*** (Isaiah 6:5) Jeremiah also informed the Lord that He had selected the wrong man for the job: ***“Ah, Sovereign Lord, I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”*** (Jeremiah 1:6)

The substance of Moses’ personal disclaimer deals with his lack of oratorical skill, literally - *“I am not a man of words...but am heavy in mouth and heavy in tongue.”*



***“Aaron As Moses’ Spokesman Before Pharaoh” by Felix Cretien***

The language of the text has led to some debate among scholars as to the degree of Moses’ communication problems. The translators of the Greek Septuagint concluded that he actually suffered from a speech impediment, rendering the phrase - *“shrill voiced, stammering, and slow of tongue.”* Hebrew scholar Umberto Cassuto seems closer to the mark when he concludes: *“The words do not signify, as many have supposed, that Moses was actually a stammerer; the meaning is only that he did not feel within himself the distinguished talents of an orator, and, in his humility, he expressed the thought with some exaggeration.”* (Cassuto, p. 49) This view is consistent with the emphasis on Moses’ humility found elsewhere in the Pentateuch: ***“(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)”*** (Numbers 12:3). The reluctant prophet was also quick to point out that the God who was



*“The Annual Procession of the Apis Bull to Predict the Future” by F.A. Bridgmann*

calling him had done nothing to address this important concern: **“neither in the past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant.”** Phillip Ryken explains the irreverent defiance inherent in these words:

*“Not only was Moses’ objection irrelevant, but it was also irreverent. Notice the wording of his complaint...This comment is really a criticism. Moses was blaming God for not giving him the gift of utterance. When he said ‘I have never been eloquent...in the past,’ he was complaining about the way God made him. And when he said, ‘nor since You have spoken,’ he was implying that if God really wanted him to go to Pharaoh, he would cure his impediment right then and there. It was as if to say, ‘Look, Lord, I’ve been standing here talking with You for fifteen whole minutes, and you **still** haven’t done anything about my speech problem!’” (Ryken, p. 115)*

**“The Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or dumb? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the Lord?’** - The Lord emphatically reminded Moses that the success of this mission did not depend upon his own paltry talents or abilities. Moses had been called by the Almighty Creator and



he could rest assured that the power of God would be at his disposal to complete the task which God had placed upon him. The prophetic mission is never dependent upon the skill of the prophet. It is empowered by the God who calls men to speak for Him. It would seem that God consistently chose those whose lack of native talent would enable them to be completely dependent upon divine inspiration and empowerment. Nahum Sarna describes *“the essence of the phenomenon of Biblical prophecy”* with these well chosen words:

*“The chosen messenger conveys not his own word, but the Word of God, and he does so because he is irresistibly compelled by a Force and a Will more powerful than his*



*“The Prophet Jeremiah” by Rembrandt*

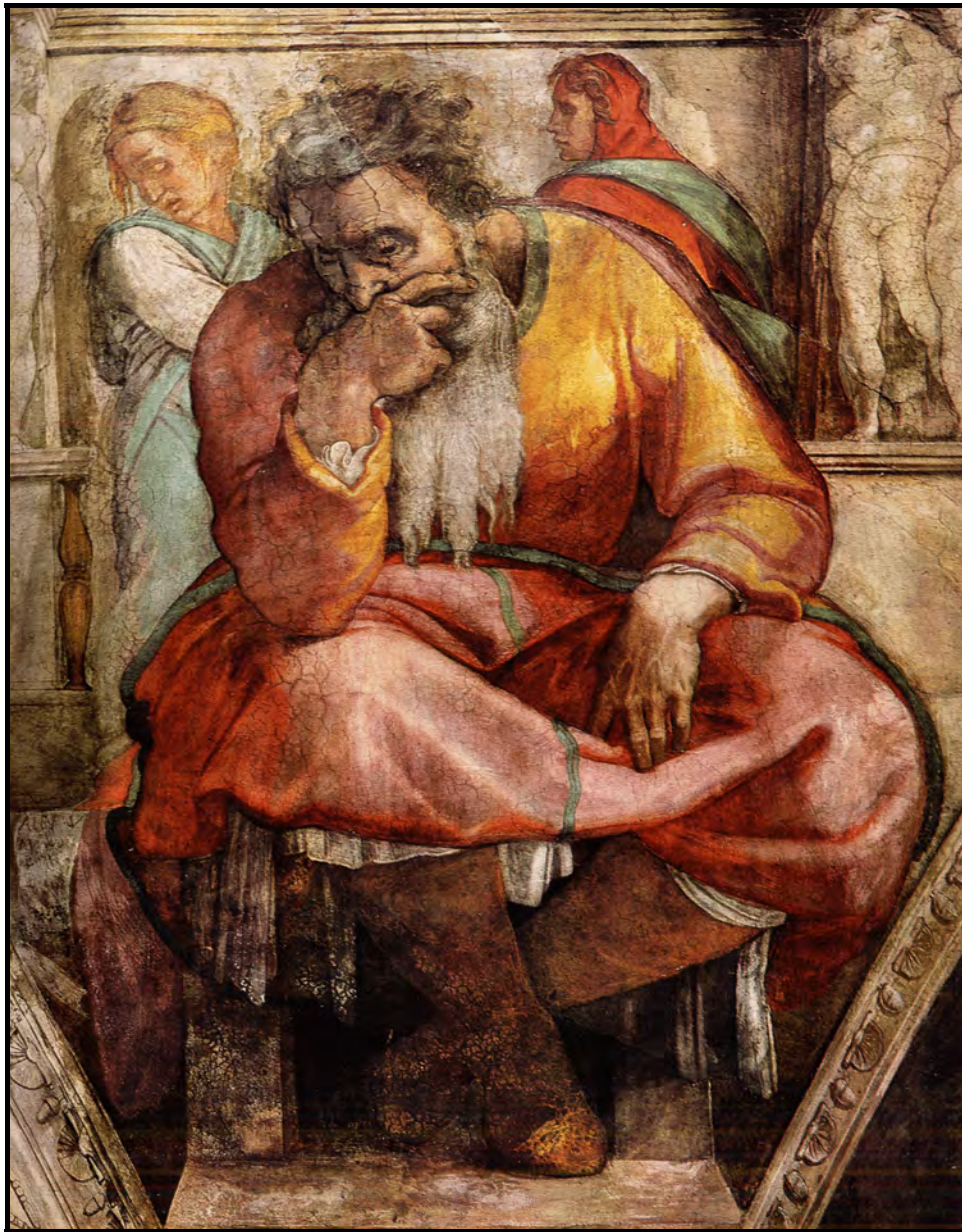
*own. Prophetic eloquence is not a matter of native talent, but of revelation that derives from the supreme Source of truth that is external to the speaker. The facile talker, the golden-tongued, the consummate demagogue, is not the recipient of the prophetic Word or the vehicle of its transmission. Prophetic eloquence is a divine gift bestowed for that purpose on him who is elected, often against his own will, to be the messenger. In these circumstances, experience and talent are irrelevant qualities.”* (Sarna 2, p. 61)

Having reminded Moses that this was completely about God and not at all about him, the Lord went on to renew the call. ***“Now go: I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”***

***“But Moses said, ‘O Lord, please send someone else to do it.’”*** - All of his excuses have been exhausted. All of his evasions have been contemptuously brushed aside. The only thing left to Moses is one last desperate plea. The literal wording of the Hebrew text - *“Please, send*



*through the hand of him You would send*” is somewhat more discreet than its English paraphrase. The words seem to imply that if God is absolutely determined to send Moses on this mission, Moses will most reluctantly accede to the Lord’s demand, but not without one more complaint. One is reminded of the querulous language of the prophet Jeremiah as he lamented his inability to evade the prophetic office:



*“The Prophet Jeremiah” by Michelangelo*



*“Aaron on the Road From Midian  
by Sandro Botticelli*

*“O Lord, You deceived me, and I was deceived; You overpowered me and prevailed...So the Word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, ‘I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,’ His Word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.”*  
(Jeremiah 20:7-9)

*“Then the Lord’s anger burned against Moses and He said, ‘What about your brother, Aaron the Levite?’ - The Lord’s gentle, patient encouragement of Moses has come to an end - “then the Lord’s anger burned.” The Lord is indeed “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6) but the point must finally come when even His longsuffering has been exhausted. The Hebrew text graphically depicts the intensity of*

the Lord’s anger with the metaphor - *“then Jahweh’s nostrils burned.”* The image is that of fire and smoke pouring forth from the nostrils of God. Similar language occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament as a visual image of the Lord’s rage or anger, typically as a prelude to judgement.

*“The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens trembled and shook; they trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.”* (2 Samuel 22:8-9; Psalm 18:9)

*“In fierce anger He has cut off every horn of Israel. He has withdrawn His right hand at the approach of the enemy. He has burned in Jacob like a flaming fire that consumes everything around it...He has poured out His wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter*





*“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

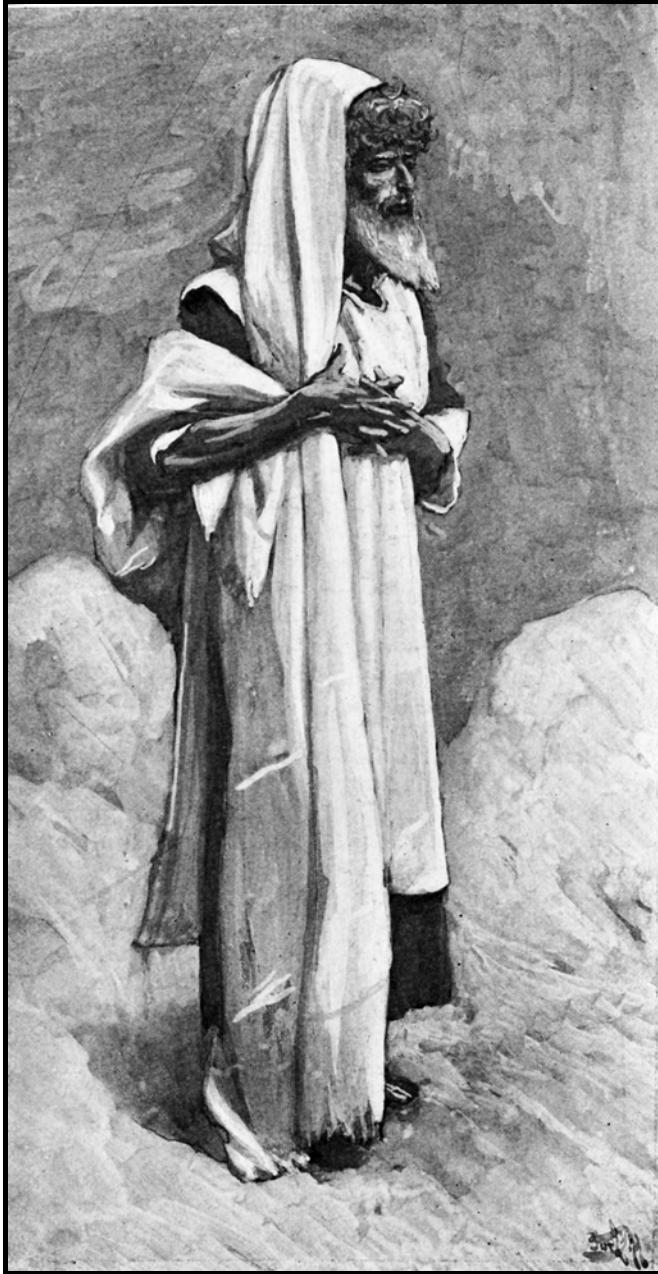
*of Zion.”* (Lamentations 2:3-4)

The Lord’s response to Moses’ continued resistance was to appoint his older brother Aaron to be his companion and his spokesman. God’s action in appointing Aaron was not merely a concession to Moses’ unwillingness to serve but also a judgement upon him for his lack of faith and trust.

*“Moses ought not to have reacted thus to so exalted and important a task as he was given; nor should he have evinced so much doubt and hesitation, and so persistently toward the Divine mission... Thus the reply contains an element of retribution... Moses, who did not willingly accept the commission with which God wishes to honor him, was punished in that the glory of fulfilling the task did not belong to him alone, but was shared, in part, by his brother Aaron.”* (Cassutto, pp. 49-50)

**“What about your brother Aaron, the Levite?”** Aaron was three years older than Moses, eighty-three years old when the two brothers appeared before Pharaoh for the first time (Exodus 7:7). Aaron’s mother was Jochebed and his father was Amram, a





*“Aaron” by J. James Tissot*

descendant of the Koheleth clan within the tribe of Levi (Exodus 6:18-20). The name *“Aaron”* means *“to be joined to.”* Here, Aaron is simply identified as *“the Levite.”* Later, in His instructions to Aaron as the High Priest of Israel, the Lord used the meaning of Aaron’s name to express the unique role of the Levites in the worship of the nation:

*“Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the Tent of the Testimony. They are to be responsible to you and are to perform all the duties of the Tent...They are to join you and to be responsible for the care of the Tent of the Meeting - all the work of the Tent - and no one else may come near where you are.”* (Numbers 18:2-4)

*“I know he can speak well.”* - The Lord preempted any further excuses by quickly pointing out that Aaron excelled in the rhetorical skills which Moses had claimed to lack. The pronoun *“he”* comes at the end of the Hebrew phrase (*“speak well can he”*) for particular emphasis. The Lord’s

words were clearly a reproach to Moses for his lack of faith. Not only does Aaron have the ability, but he is also willing and eager to serve, again, unlike his brother - *“He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you.”* Cassutto paraphrases the contrast implicit in the text with these words: *“He is not like you...He will not doubt or hesitate as you did, but will rejoice greatly at seeing you and will collaborate with you in the accomplishment of My mission.”* (Cassutto, p.

50) The text seems to infer that Moses had maintained a relationship with his Hebrew family throughout his years in Egypt and that Aaron would therefore be eager to be reunited with his younger brother and join him in this great task. Later in the Chapter (Exodus 4:27) we are informed that God had come to Aaron and instructed him to go out into the desert to meet Moses and accompany him back to Egypt.

***“You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.”*** - The Lord carefully defined the relationship which was to exist between Moses and Aaron in a manner designed to allay any remaining doubts that Moses may have had. At the same time this description formed an ironic parody of the divine pretensions of Egypt’s monarch. A.S. Yahuda explains the pointed mockery of the text in this way:

*“Exodus 4:16 reads literally: ‘he (Aaron) shall be to thee a mouth and thou shalt be to him a god (Elohim).’ Here ‘mouth’ is used metaphorically for the representative, being a literal rendering of the Egyptian ‘ra’ (‘mouth’), a very common title of a high office at the court of Pharaoh. The office of a ‘mouth’ was so important indeed that it was held by the highest state dignitaries. Thus, especially in the New Kingdom the titles ‘mouth’ (‘ra’) and ‘chief mouth’ (‘ra-hery’) frequently occur in reference to persons of high rank, who, as chief superintendents and overseers of public works, acted as intermediaries between the king and government officials. In some cases, they are called ‘mouth’ or ‘chief mouth of the*



***“Aaron Speaking for Moses Before Pharaoh”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration***

king,' e.g. Ahmose, the Commander in Chief of Thutmosis III says of himself: 'I was the mouth of the King who brought tranquillity to the whole land and who filled the heart of the king with love and satisfaction every day and the king made me chief mouth of his house.'" (Yahuda, p.95)

This arrangement would not only deal with Moses' articulation problems it would also serve to increase his stature before the Egyptian Court. By appearing before Pharaoh with a "mouth" of his own, Moses would be presented as an equal of the Egyptian king - a peer who would be competent to deal with him on his own level.

God would continue to speak to Moses directly and Moses would then convey the words of God to Aaron - "**You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth.**" The Lord promised that He would watch over and bless both of them guiding the process from beginning to end - "**I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do.**" Thus, the relationship between Moses and Aaron would be comparable to that of a prophet and the god whom he represented in that Aaron would not be proclaiming his own words but merely repeating the words of Moses - "**He will speak to the people for you and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him.**" It is significant to note that the Hebrew text of this startling analogy does not use the proper name of the one true God but the broader term "elohim" which occurs in the Old Testament not only in reference to God but also to angels ((Psalm 8:5) and human rulers and judges (Psalm 82:1,6). The NIV's capitalization of the noun, indicative of a reference to the true God, is to that extent misleading in this context.

**"But take this staff in your hand so that you can perform miraculous signs with it."**  
- The interview concludes with a final reference to the staff of power and the pivotal role that it will play, not only in the initial confrontation with Pharaoh but throughout the plagues which would follow. By noting the staff and the "**miraculous signs**" which would be performed with God was once again assuring Moses of the divine power which will be available to him throughout the difficult days ahead. Moses offered no further objection to his selection as God's representative to the royal court of Egypt.





*"The Return to Egypt" by Alessandro Botticelli*

### ***Moses Returns To Egypt Exodus 4:18-31***

*Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive." Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well." Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead." So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God*



*“Moses and His Family on the Road to Egypt”  
14<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

*in his hand. The Lord said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is My firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let My son go so that he may worship Me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.” At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’ feet with it. “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,” she said. So the Lord let him alone. (At that time she said “bridegroom*

*of blood,” referring to circumcision.) The Lord said to Aaron, “Go into the desert to meet Moses.” So he met Moses at the Mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform. Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them everything the Lord had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, and they believed. And when they heard that the Lord was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.*

*“Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him...” - Before he could set out for Egypt Moses had to return to Midian to inform “Jethro his father-in-law” of his intent and obtain his permission for the journey. By marrying Zipporah, Moses had become a part of Jethro’s family and in this patriarchal culture it was necessary Jethro, as the head of the entire family, to approve the departure of Moses, his wife and his children from the rest of the clan. The negative consequences of Jacob’s unsuccessful attempt to secretly remove his family from the household of his father-in-law Laban clearly indicate the importance of these customs in the ancient*

Near East (cf. Genesis 31). Moses is less than candid in his explanation to Jethro - ***“Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive.”*** He clearly expresses his own identity as a Hebrew and his genuine concern for ***“my own people in Egypt.”*** This is the same phrase which had previously been used to describe his attitude toward the Hebrews prior to the killing of the Egyptian - ***“One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people.”*** (Exodus 2:11-12) The phrase ***“to see if any of them are still alive”*** is a Hebrew idiom which is not limited to mere survival but includes general welfare in the wider sense. Nahum Sarna more accurately translates the phrase - ***“and see how they are faring.”*** But while Moses’ words are accurate as far as they go, he has completely omitted any reference to the call of God and his own role in the impending deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. Perhaps he was concerned that if Jethro had understood the full implications of his departure, his father-in-law would have attempted to prevent his return to Egypt. In any case, wise old Jethro certainly recognized the hand of God in this sudden request from his son-in-law. He did not raise any objection and gave both his permission and his blessing for the journey: ***“Jethro said, ‘Go, and I wish you well.’”***



***“The Staff of Moses Transformed Into A Serpent at the Burning Bush”***  
***19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving***



***“Now the Lord had said to Moses in Midian, ‘Go back to Egypt for all the men that wanted to kill you are dead.’”*** - As Moses makes the final preparations for his actual departure the Lord comes to him once again with words of encouragement and instruction. The NIV inaccurately translates the verb in the pluperfect tense - ***“the Lord had said”*** - suggesting that these comments were a part of God’s original revelation to Moses at the burning bush. That is clearly not the intent of the text. This

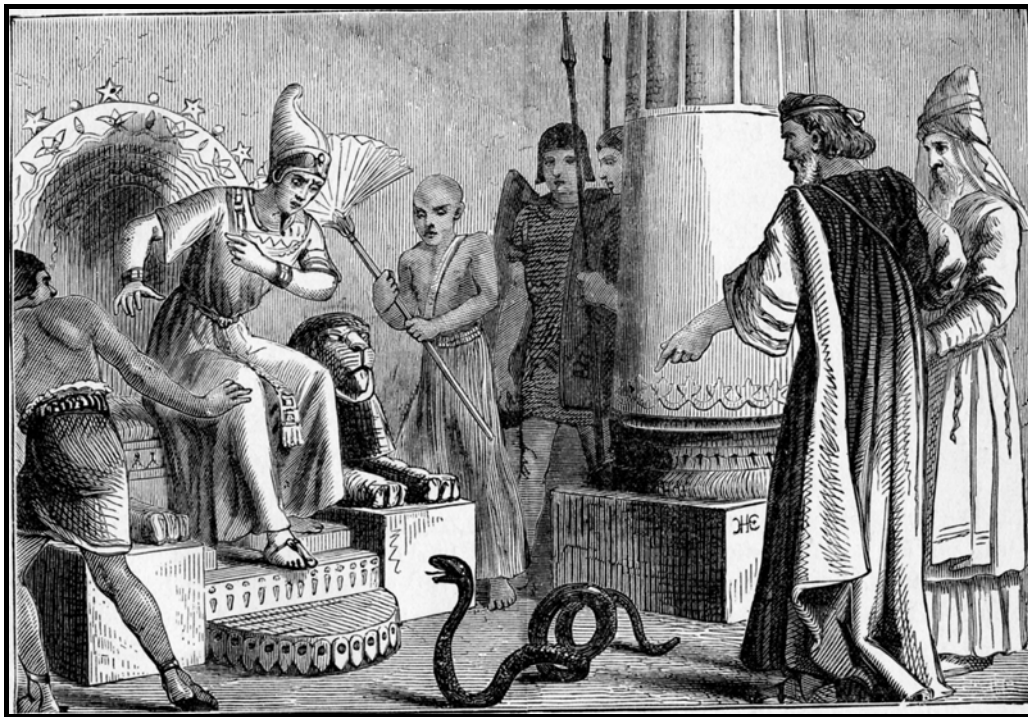


***“The Mummy Case of Pharaoh Amenhotep I”***

is a distinctly subsequent message from God on the eve of Moses’ return to Egypt. ***“All the men that wanted to kill you are dead.”*** Moses had lived in Midian for forty years, more than a generation. Amenhotep I had reigned over the Two Lands at the time of Moses’ flight. He was succeeded by his nephew-in-law, Thutmose I, who ruled for eighteen years. Thutmose had four children, three of whom predeceased him. He was survived by his daughter, Hatshepsut and her husband became Pharaoh Thutmose II. Thutmose II and his Queen Hatshepsut ruled Egypt at the time of Moses’ return. Thus, the Pharaoh who had known Moses as a prince of Egypt and all who may have been aware of his killing of the Egyptian taskmaster had long since passed from the scene. Both the privileges and the problems of Moses’ past are now behind him as he returns to Egypt. History has

wiped the slate clean so that the past will present no obstacles to the task which God has set before him. ***“After the many years in exile, his situation is now totally different from the one he left. A new generation has grown up. Moses is no longer the wanted criminal but neither is he the grandson of Pharaoh.”*** (Larsson, p. 40)

***“So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.”*** - Moses sets out on his journey accompanied by his family. The phrase ***“his wife and sons”*** is not restricted to these individuals. This is a characteristic Hebrew idiom for an entire household including servants and other relatives. The fact that Moses takes family with him signals that this is not merely a visit after which he would return to Midian and the household of Jethro. Moses is leaving Midian for good to casting his lot with his kinsmen in Egypt. The reference to sons is something of a surprise in that only one son (***“Gershom”*** cf. Exodus 2:22) has been mentioned in Exodus heretofore. Later, we will be informed that Moses had two sons, ***“Gershom”*** and ***“Eliezar”*** (Exodus 18:2-4) and that is apparently the point of the plural reference here. The text notes that Moses ***“put them on a donkey”*** at the beginning of their journey perhaps to indicate his solicitude for his family and to point out that he had accumulated at least some possessions during his stay in Midian. Rabbinic tradition suggests that this was the very animal upon which Abraham had gone forth at God’s command to sacrifice Isaac his only son (cf. Genesis 22:3-5) thereby linking Moses to the patriarchs and asserting the crucial role of his journey in God’s plan of salvation. Moses does not depart for Egypt unarmed - ***“And he took the staff of God in his hand.”*** This is the shepherd’s crook which had been transformed at the burning bush into ***“the staff of God”***



***“The Staff of God Transformed Into a Serpent Before Pharaoh”***  
***19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration***

through which great signs and wonders would be accomplished before Pharaoh and his court.

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have given you the power to do.’”*** - The “wonders” of which the Lord speaks are not merely the three signs which Moses had already witnessed. These were intended primarily to authenticate Moses before the elders of Israel (cf. Exodus 4:1-5). The reference here extends beyond those signs to include all of the ten plagues which the Lord will bring down upon the land of Egypt. The “***staff of God***” in Moses’ hand signified his ability to perform these miraculous signs by the power of God. But even these incredible wonders will not impress Egypt’s proud stubborn king and God will use his obstinate resistance to prolong and thus to dramatize the total defeat of the false gods of Egypt personified and represented by Pharaoh himself - ***“But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.”*** This is the first of twenty times that the Book of Exodus refers to the “*hardening of the heart.*” As will be seen in greater detail in the events which follow, the “*hardening of the heart*” occurs in those instances in which the sinner has already defiantly disobeyed and rejected God and the “*hardening*” which is then imposed upon him is God’s righteous judgement for his sin. Lutheran theologian George Stoeckhart writes:

*“We have shown above that the judgement of obduration, on which the extreme wrath follows, always has as its necessary antecedent condition the self-hardening of man. God has previously offered grace to those whom He ultimately hardens and condemns and has earnestly sought to save them, but they would not.”* (Pieper, III, p. 497)

***“Then say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says: Israel is My firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let My son go, so he may worship Me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.’”*** - God described the unique role of Israel in the plan of salvation as the chosen nation from whom the Messiah of humanity would be born with His declaration ***“Israel is My firstborn son.”*** This language anticipates the covenant which would later be formalized at Mt. Sinai in the gracious promise which God would bestow upon Israel through Moses:

***“This is what you are to say to the House of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles wings and brought you to***



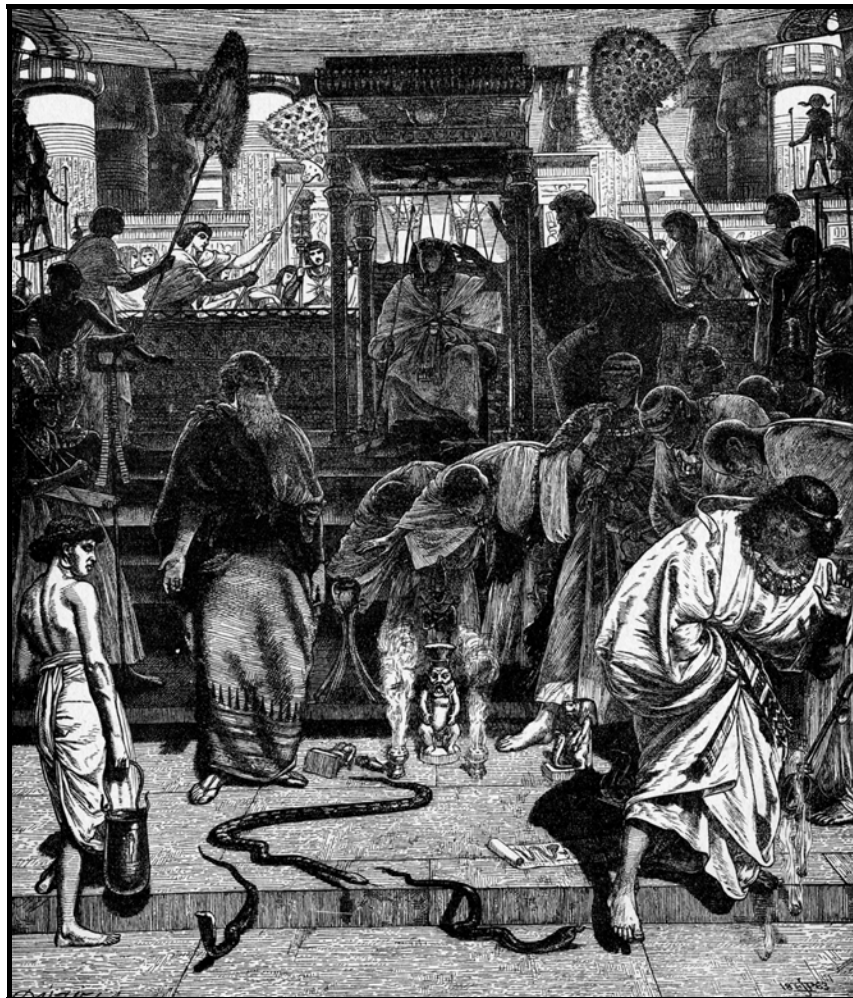
*Myself. Now if you obey Me fully and keep My covenant, then out of all the nations you will be My treasured possession. Although the whole world is mine, you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’” (Exodus 19:4-6)*



*“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” by Gustav Dore*

The humbling of mighty Egypt and the deliverance of Israel from their slavery to Pharaoh would be the decisive demonstration of God’s loving concern for His chosen people. The image of Israel as God’s chosen possession, His firstborn son, continues throughout the balance of the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 14:1-2, the Lord reminded His people: *“You are the children of the Lord your God...you are a people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord*

*has chosen you to be His treasured possession.*” In the “*Song of Moses,*” the prophet used the same imagery to lament the sinful unfaithfulness of the people in contrast to the paternal love of God: “*You deserted the Rock who fathered you, you forgot the God who gave you birth...they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful.*” (Deuteronomy 32:18,20) Through the prophet Hosea God affirmed His faithful love for His wayward people: “*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. But the more I called Israel, the further they went from Me.*” (Hosea 11:1) God used the powerful imagery to express His willingness to forgive the remnant of Israel that will repent and return to Him: “*I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel’s Father and Ephraim is My firstborn son...Is not Ephraim My dear son, the child in whom I delight?*” (Jeremiah 31:9,20)



*“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” by E.J. Poynter*

At the same time the designation of Israel as the **“firstborn son”** of God indicates that God’s love extends beyond the Jews to every nation. Israel was *“blessed to be a blessing,”* to use the apt phrase of Harley Swiggum, the author of the Bethel Bible Series. God’s selection of this one nation was an expression of His steadfast love for every nation and His intention from the beginning was that through Israel all the nations of the earth would be blessed. *“In this title, the calling of the heathen is implied. Israel was not to be Jehovah’s only son, but simply the firstborn, who was particularly dear to his Father and had certain privileges above the rest.”* (Keil/Delitsch, p. 351)

***“And I told you, ‘Let My son go, so that he may worship Me.’ But you refused to let him go so I will kill your firstborn son.”*** - As a result of

the unique role of the nation of Israel in the plan of salvation, the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage takes on particular significance. The eternal fate of humanity was at stake here! Those who raised their hand against the Children of Israel, the custodians of the promise of the Messiah and the nation from whom the world’s Savior would come, were guilty of striking out against ***“the apple of His eye”*** as the Lord would later warn through His prophet Zechariah: ***“For whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye.”*** (Zechariah 2:8) Therefore, the King of Egypt was to be clearly

warned of the jeopardy in which he placed himself and the people of his country if he continued to defy the Lord’s demand for the liberation of the Israelites. The punishment upon him and because of him upon his people would fit the enormity of the crime. Because of his obstinate resistance to God’s clear and repeated command, the plagues would culminate in the most horrible plague of all, the death of the firstborn in every Egyptian household, from the palace of Pharaoh to the most lowly peasant’s hut.



***“Pharaoh Thutmose II” 19<sup>th</sup> Century Illustration***



***“At a lodging place along the way the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him.”*** - This episode is without a doubt one of the most puzzling in the Book of Exodus. Its significance is fiercely debated among bible scholars. The events occur in the course of Moses’ journey from Midian back to Egypt ***“at a lodging place along the way.”*** The original Hebrew literally refers to a *“night stop”* (Hebrew *“malon”*). The term is quite general. It could merely refer to an oasis in the desert where travelers would erect their tents around a spring sheltered by a grove of palms. However, the word could also describe an actual inn permanently constructed at a convenient point along the trade route. The text does not provide sufficient detail to formulate a specific

conclusion as to the nature of this ***“lodging place along the way.”***



***“Balaam Before the Angel of the Lord”***  
by F. G. Waltges

The abrupt announcement that ***“the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him”*** is the most startling dimension of this perplexing series of events. The incident is similar to Balaam’s confrontation with ***“the Angel of the Lord”*** (Numbers 22:21-35) and Joshua’s encounter with the ***“Commander of the Army of the Lord”*** (Joshua 5:13-15). In both of these episodes the protagonist was confronted by a menacing figure with a drawn sword in hand who conveys a message from God. Some of the traditions of the rabbis also suggest that it was the Angel of the Lord who confronted and threatened Moses in this instance, and that is, in fact, the reading of the Greek Septuagint text, although not the original Hebrew. A careful review of all of the Old

Testament’s references to ***“the Angel of the Lord”*** (Hebrew - *“malach Jahweh”*) indicates that this title was a designation for the pre-incarnate Messiah, the second Member of the divine Trinity. Other Judaic traditions and some references from books of the Old Testament Apocrypha contend that it was an evil angel determined to prevent the liberation of the Hebrew slaves which confronted Moses on the way

back to Egypt. So the Apocryphal Book of Jubilees reports:

*“And you, Moses, know what Prince Mastema, (an evil angel from Hell) desired to do with you when you returned to Egypt, on the way, when you met him at the shelter. Did he not desire to kill you with all of his might and save the Egyptians from your hand, because he saw that you were sent to execute judgment and vengeance upon the Egyptians?”* (Jubilees 48:2-4)

All this fanciful speculation and embellishment is indicative of the difficulty which interpreters across the centuries have had in attempting to understand and explain this obscure incident. As always, it is wiser to remain with the *“nuda verba”* (the bare words) of the Biblical text and resist the temptation to improve upon that text.

The precise nature of the peril which confronted Moses is not clearly indicated. Some commentators interpret the words *“and was about to kill him”* as a reference to the sudden onset of severe illness which brought Moses to the point of death. Others insist that, given the circumstances of this direct confrontation, Moses’ life was threatened *“by some act proceeding from God Himself.”* (Keil/Delitsch) Again, the text does not provide sufficient detail for a definitive conclusion. It is interesting to note that the Hebrew phrase which describes the mortal threat makes use of the same language as God’s previous announcement that it was now safe for Moses to return to Egypt *“for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.”* (Exodus 4:19)

Whatever the specific nature of the threat to Moses’ life may have been, his peril was very real. Zipporah, his wife, takes action because Moses is apparently incapacitated and unable to do so himself. Zipporah evidently recognized the basis for God’s grievance against her husband and moved quickly to correct it: *“But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’ feet with it.”* Moses had failed to circumcise Eliezar, his second son. That failure violated the clear command of God in the covenant which the Lord had established many years earlier with the patriarch Abraham:

*“This is My covenant with you and with your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep. Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision and it will be the sign of the covenant between Me and you...My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male, who has not*

*been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people. He has broken My covenant.” (Genesis 17:9-14).*



*“Moses and the Daughters of Jethro” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century British Painting*

Rabbinic tradition taught that Moses had not circumcised Eliezar because of a prenuptial agreement which was the price Jethro’s approval of his marriage to Zipporah:

*“Thereupon Jethro gave much money to Moses and he bestowed his daughter Zipporah to him as wife, giving her to him under the condition that the children born of the marriage in Jethro’s house should be divided into two equal classes, one Israelite and the other Egyptian.”*  
(Ginzberg, p. 294)

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., Christian commentator Ephraem Syrus contended that it was





*“Moses and the Daughters of Jethro” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration*

not Jethro but Zipporah herself who had objected to the circumcision of both of her sons as a matter of family pride:

*“He married Zipporah who bore him two sons: one he circumcised, but the other she did not let him circumcise. For she took pride in her father and brothers who were uncircumcised, and although she had agreed to be Moses’ wife, she did not wish to adopt his religion...She thus allowed one to continue on the circumcision of Abraham, while forbidding the other to be circumcised, through whom her father’s tradition of the foreskin would be preserved.” (Kugel, p. 307)*

That view receives some support from the reluctance and resentment evident in Zipporah’s circumcision of her second son. She was apparently familiar with the ceremony and its significance. The fact that it was only necessary to circumcise one of the two boys at this time suggests that her older son Gershom had already been

circumcised. The text also specifically notes her use of a “*a flint knife,*” the traditional instrument for the rite of circumcision (cf. Joshua 5:2-3).

Whatever the reasons for Moses’ failure to circumcise his son may have been, his failure to do so was a most serious matter in the eyes of God. Alfred Edersheim explained the urgency of the issue in this way:

*“And yet Moses, who was declare Israel the heir to this precious legacy was himself at the time living in neglect of the sign of that very covenant! His own second son had not been circumcised according to the divine commandment...But judgement must begin in the house of God, and no one is fit to be employed as an instrument of God who in any way lives in neglect of His commandments. God met even His chosen servant Moses as an enemy.”* (Edersheim, pp. 57-58)

Contemporary commentator Rousas Rushdooney put the matter somewhat more



*“Moses Rescues the Daughters of Jethro” by Matthias Merian*



*“Moses Defending Zipporah and Her Sisters at the Well of Midian” by Arnold Friberg*

bluntly when he declared: *“God also served notice that Moses was to obey Him, not his wife. Moses had in his hand the staff, which was to humble and break Pharaoh. How could he command obedience to God from Pharaoh while not yielding it himself?”* (Rushdooney, p. 53)

Having performed the rite, Zipporah took the proof of the deed, the bloody foreskin of her son - ***“and touched Moses’ feet with it.”*** The text literally says that she rubbed or smeared the blood onto Moses in a manner that previewed the deliverance of the Children of Israel from the Angel of Death by the blood smeared on their doorposts and lintels at the first Passover. The Hebrew term *“raglayim”* identifies the portion of Moses’ body to which the blood was applied. The noun can mean *“feet,” “legs,”* or *“genitals.”* Since circumcision itself was the removal of the foreskin it is most probable that a genital reference is intended here. The blood upon her husband signified the fact that his family had now complied with the requirements of God’s covenant..

***“‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me,’ she said. So the Lord let him alone. (At that time she said, ‘bridegroom of blood’ referring to circumcision.”*** - But even as Zipporah did what was necessary to save her husband’s life, she forcefully





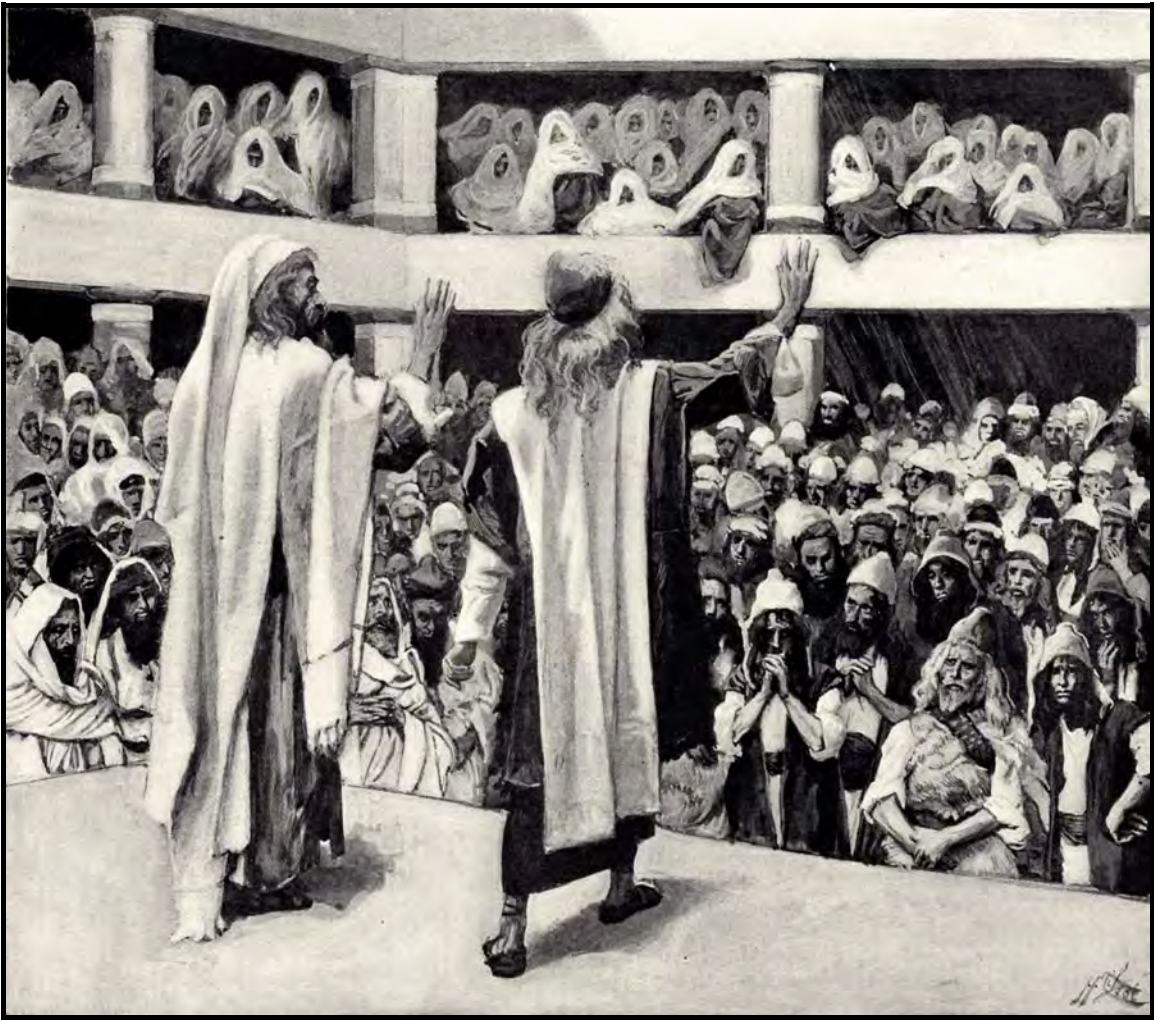
*“Moses and Aaron”*

expressed her resentment of the need to do so, both by her action of smearing the blood upon Moses and through the label which she applied to him. Zipporah scornfully identified Moses as her **“bridegroom of blood.”** The text goes on to explain this dubious distinction as a reference to the blood of circumcision. This Midianite bride was obviously unhappy with the fact that her family had to be subjected to the Hebrew customs of her husband’s people. Zipporah’s resentments notwithstanding, the Lord’s anger was assuaged by the family’s belated conformity to the sign of the covenant and the threat to Moses life was removed - **“So the Lord left him alone.”**

It would appear that in the aftermath of this strange episode Moses sent his family back to Midian, either because of Zipporah’s resentment or because of a recognition of the perilous nature of the mission upon which he was embarking. Exodus 18:2 reports: **“After Moses had sent away his**

**wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons.”** The family would later be reunited when Jethro came out to meet Moses and the Israelites after the exodus from Egypt.

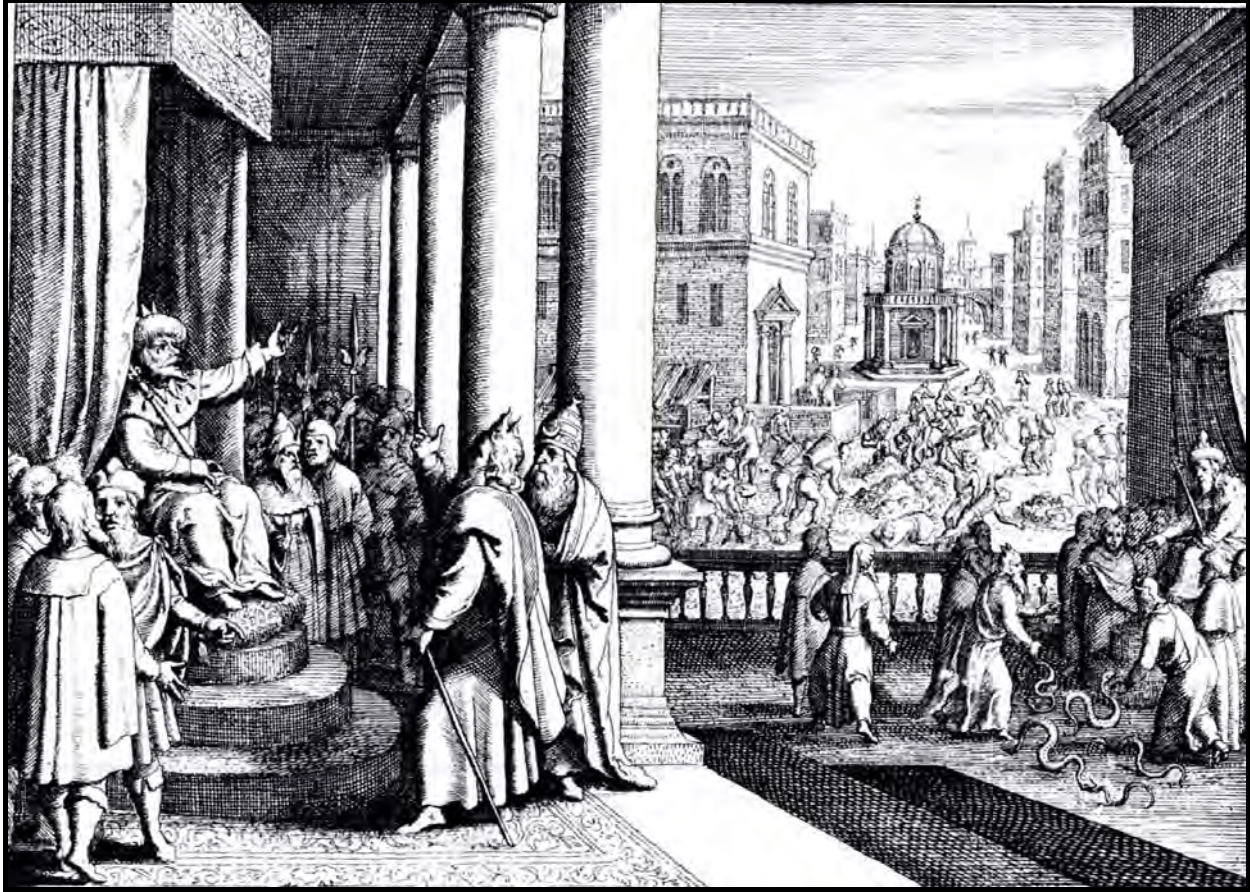
**“The Lord said to Aaron, ‘Go into the desert to meet Moses.’ So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. Then Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform.”** - The joyful reunion of the two long separated brothers took place most appropriately **“at the mountain of God.”** In order to facilitate this reunion the Lord had commanded Aaron to **“Go out into the desert to meet Moses”** and Aaron had obeyed without hesitation or complaint. The text appears to go out of its way to emphasize the love and affection which existed between Moses and Aaron - **“So he met**



*“Moses and Aaron Before the Elders of Israel” by J. James Tissot*

*was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.”* - Moses had expressed deep misgivings and fear that the Israelites would not accept him. But God had promised Moses that the people would heed his message and recognize him as a true spokesman of the Lord. That promise was now fulfilled. There is no indication of doubt or hesitation from the elders. The miraculous signs which God had provided were evidently more than adequate to authenticate the message which Moses announced through his spokesman Aaron. The elders rejoiced at the news that God had not forgotten them and that He was prepared to act to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. Their response to that good news is spontaneous worship as they bow down before the Lord. *“The section comes to an end with this scene which shows us the luminous picture of people bowing and prostrating themselves in gratitude to the Lord for the heartening tidings that Moses and Aaron had announced in His Name as His envoys.”* (Cassutto, p. 63)





*“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” - 17<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving by Matthias Merian*

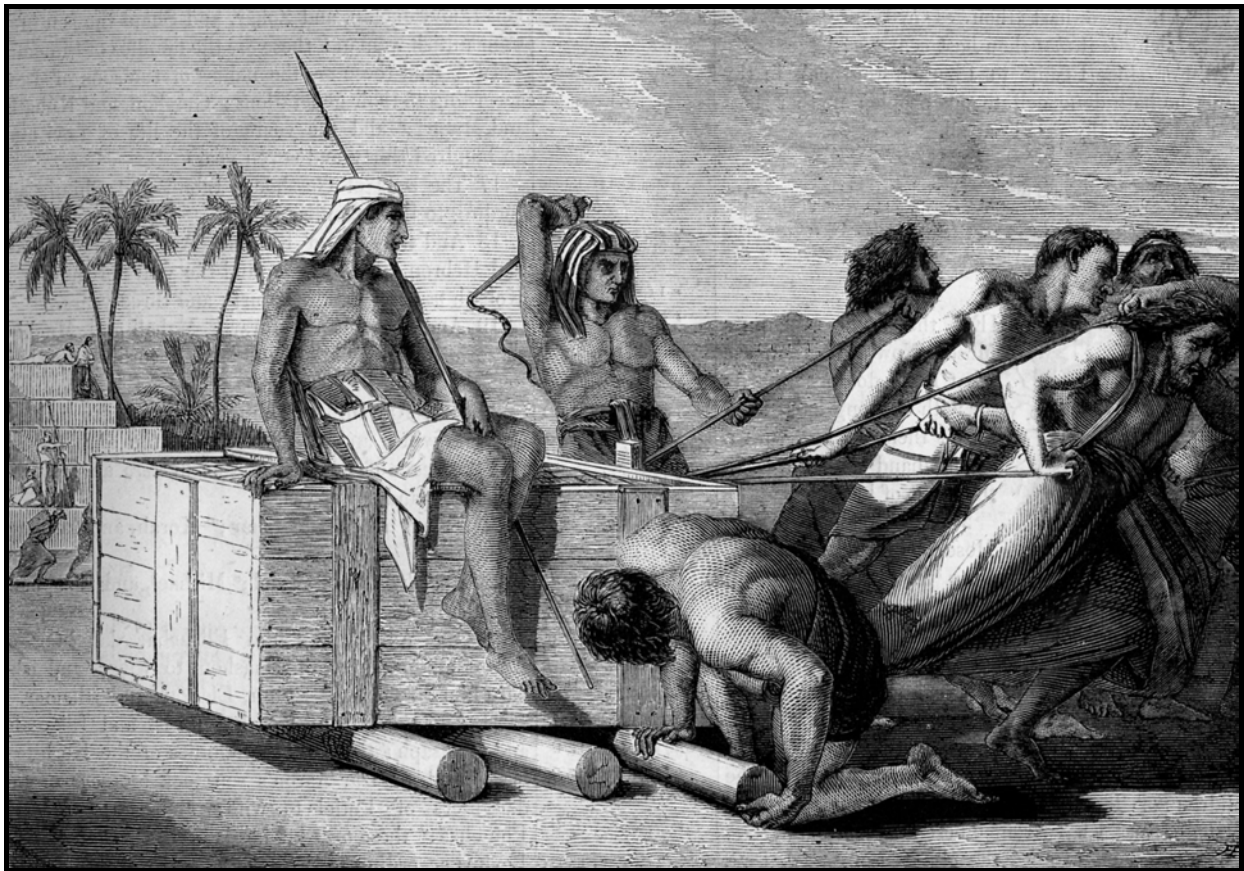
## ***The First Confrontation With Pharaoh***

### ***Exodus 5:1-14***

***Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival for Me in the desert.’” Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.” Then they said, “The Lord God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword.” But the king of Egypt said, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!” Then Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land are now numerous and you are stopping them from working.” That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: “You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number***



*of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: "I will not give you any more straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.' So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw." The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, "Why haven't you met your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?" "Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh...." - After receiving the support of*



*"Egyptian Taskmasters" - 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Bible Illustration*

the tribal elders, Moses moved quickly to confront the king of Egypt. As previously noted (cf. p. 126) the reigning Pharaoh was Thutmose II, remembered in Egyptian history as a weak and ineffective ruler, who was dominated by his dynamic wife



*“The First Appearance Before Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot*

Queen Hatshepsut. God had instructed Moses to take the elders of Israel along with him when he appeared before Pharaoh, however, the text here indicates that Moses and Aaron appeared before the king alone. Hebrew tradition informs us that Moses attempted to obey the Lord’s command on this point but that the elders had abandoned him on the way to Pharaoh’s palace.

*“Thereupon Moses invited the elders to go to Pharaoh with him, but they lacked the courage to appear before the king. Though they started out with Moses, they dropped off stealthily on the way, one by one, and when Moses and Aaron stood in the presence of the king, they found themselves alone, deserted by all the others.” (Ginzberg, p. 330)*

The tradition further indicates that in punishment for their failure to stand by Moses before the king the elders were denied the right to accompany Moses into the exalted presence of God upon Mt. Sinai. Whatever their reasons may have been, the elders did not accompany Moses on his first appearance in the throne room of Pharaoh and, as the balance of this chapter will document, they will be quick to disassociate themselves from his mission when it appeared to have failed.





*“The Mummy of Pharaoh  
Thutmose II*

The message which Moses and Aaron brought to the Pharaoh was simple and direct: ***“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival to Me in the desert.’”*** Their announcement began with what would become the standard formula for introducing a prophetic address in Holy Scripture. In the familiar words of the King James Version this Hebrew phrase is rendered - *“Thus saith the Lord.”* The divine name which occurs in the phrase is *“Yahweh,”* the sacred name by which God had revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush. (cf. Exodus 3:14) With this introduction Moses and Aaron make it clear from the outset that they do not speak for themselves not do they presume to proclaim their own words. They stand before the king as emissaries of the sovereign Lord of the Universe. In this context, in the presence of a pagan king who has never before heard the Name of *“Yahweh,”* they further identify the Lord as ***“the God of Israel.”*** The divine command ***“Let My people go!”*** will continue to resound throughout the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh. It is repeated seven times (Exodus 5:1; 7:16,26; 8:16; 9:1,13; 10:3).

The specific request that was presented to Pharaoh was for a furlough that would enable Israel to go out into the desert to ***“hold a festival”*** dedicated to their God. As previously noted (cf. pp.93-95), this limited initial request was mercifully designed to make it easier for the king to comply, thereby sparing himself and his people the torment of the plagues which would follow his obstinate refusals. The historical record makes it clear that the approval of such requests from various groups of slave laborers was a routine part of Egyptian





practice.

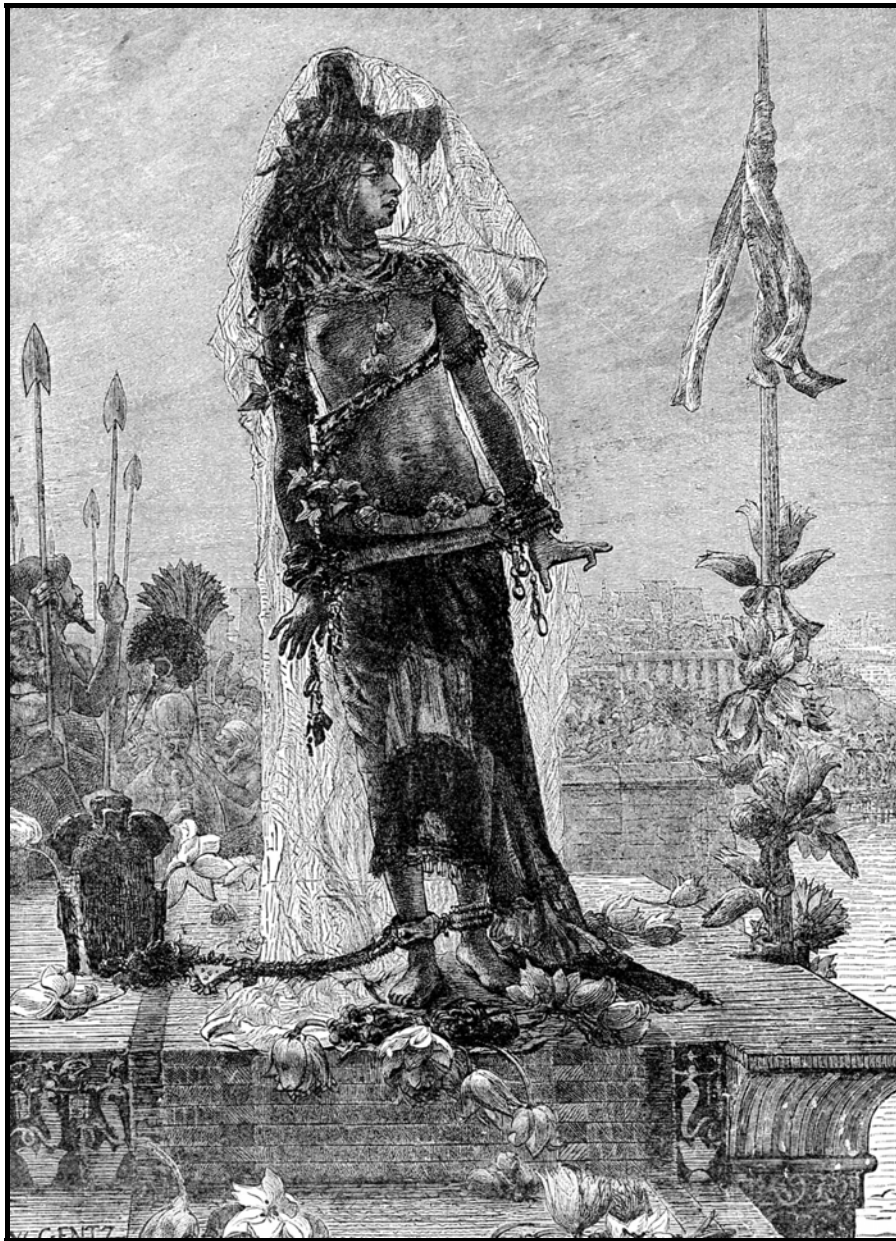
*“Such a request was not without precedent. An ancient manuscript at the Louvre, dating to the time of Ramses II, indicates that Egyptian slaves were sometimes given time off to worship their gods. There is also a limestone tablet from the same period listing the names of slaves, together with reasons for their absence from work, including the phrase, ‘has sacrificed to the god.’ What this proves is that pharaohs sometimes honored the kind of request that Moses and Aaron were making.”* (Ryken, p. 141)

Nonetheless, in this instance, the request was brusquely denied. The phrase **“so that they may hold a festival”** might more accurately be translated *“so that they might make a pilgrimage.”* The Hebrew noun *“hag,”* which occurs here, is *“a sacrificial feast associated with a pilgrimage to a sanctuary.”* (Sarna, p. 27) The Muslim *“haj,”* the annual pilgrimage of the faithful to Mecca, is an Arabic word derived from the same stem.

**“Pharaoh said, ‘Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go.’** - The Pharaoh’s response was contemptuous and curt. He denied any knowledge of **“the Lord”** and categorically refused any recognition of His power. The king’s words **“Who is the Lord”** form an arrogant parody of the humble disclaimer of Moses at the burning bush - **“Who am I that I should go...”** (Exodus 3:11) Pharaoh’s prideful blasphemy has set the stage for the plagues which will follow. This has now become a confrontation between Pharaoh as the personification of Egypt’s gods and the God



**“The Mummy of Ramses II”**



*“A Human Sacrifice to Hapi the Nile God” by W. Gentz*

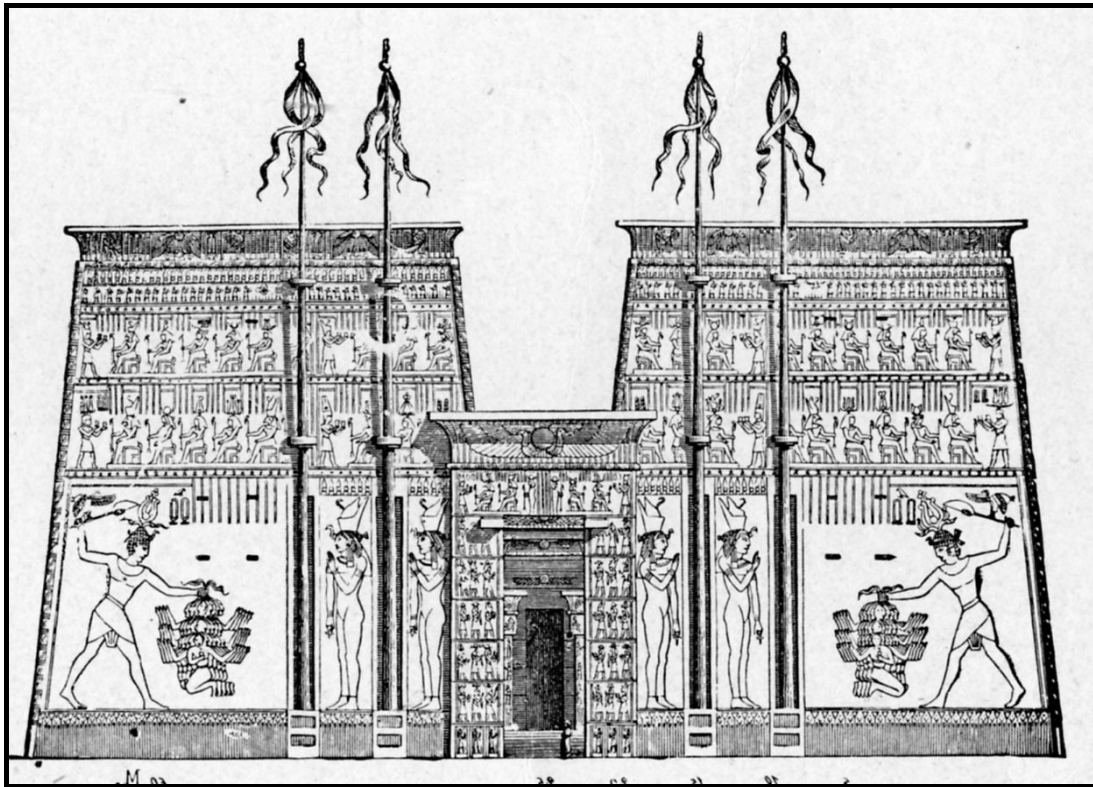
of Israel whom he has scorned. Religion was central to the life of ancient Egypt and Pharaoh as an incarnate god was central to Egypt’s religion. The king chose to perceive Yahweh’s demand as a direct challenge to his own divine authority. Sarna does not exaggerate the facts when he asserts: *“The Pharaoh was the incarnation of a god in Egyptian doctrine. This divine status meant that his power was unlimited, that his will was incontestable law, and that his utterances possessed divine force. He regards himself as JHWH’s superior.”* (Sarna, p. 27) Pharaoh’s bold announcement that he did not know God will come back to haunt him as ten times the purpose of the



plagues which will devastate Egypt will be explained as enabling him to “*know*” the God of Israel (cf. Exodus 7:5; 17; 8:6,18;; 9:14,29; 10:2; 11:17; 14:4,18). The king hurled God’s demand back into the faces of Moses and Aaron sarcastically mimicking their words. He categorically declared “*I will not let Israel go.*”

***“Then they said, ‘The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God or He may strike us with plagues or with the sword.’”*** - After receiving Pharaoh’s harsh reply, Moses and Aaron restated their request in a considerably milder manner. They appear to have been somewhat intimidated by the monarch’s aggressive arrogance. It is difficult to avoid the sad conclusion of Dr. John Durham:

*“The first result of Pharaoh’s decisive and unyielding response, however, is the demoralization of Moses and Aaron...They are outclassed and overwhelmed by this Pharaoh...There is no hint now of any command. Their confidence is gone, and they are begging favors from a powerful superior.”* (Durham, p. 64)



***“The Facade of an Egyptian Temple Showing Pharaoh Triumphantly Striking Down His Enemies***



*"A Princess of Egypt" by Ferdinand Keller*

They did not dare to repeat the sacred Name of God which had provoked such a strong reaction from the king. Nor did they issue demands in His Name. They simply reported an encounter with *"the God of the Hebrews."* This familiar designation would have been much less threatening to Pharaoh. They apologetically described an unexpected encounter with this deity and indicated concern that if they would fail to comply with their God's demand for sacrifices in the desert that His judgement might come upon them in reprisal and destroy them. Implicit in their words is an unspoken appeal to Pharaoh's own self-interest. Dead slaves are no good to anyone! The standard terminology of the day - *"He may strike us with plagues or with the sword"* - is utilized to describe God's possible retribution upon His people should they fail to comply. Given the reference to *"plagues,"* some commentators have argued that these

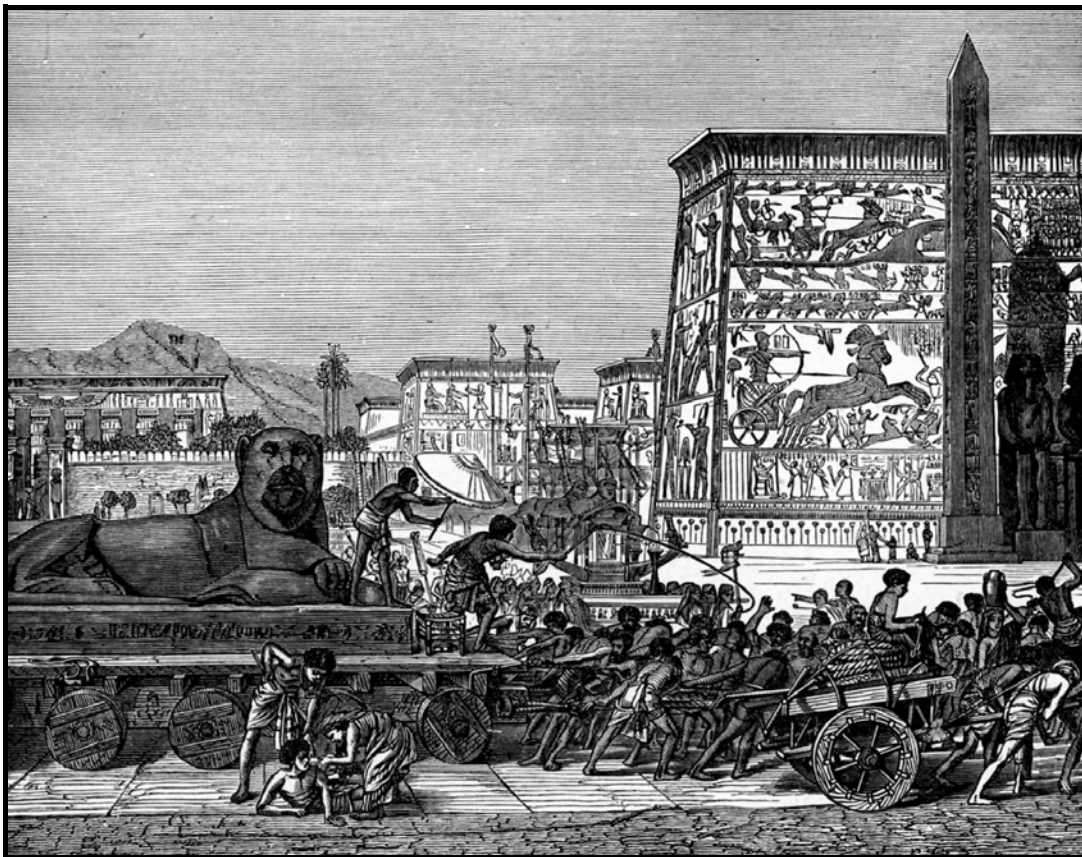
words may have been intended as a warning of divine retribution upon both the Israelites and the Egyptians. While that broader understanding of the pronoun *"us"* is possible, in this context it does not appear likely. *"They plead fear of Yahweh's reprisal, which would of course mean a loss to Pharaoh greater than the loss of three days work."* (Durham, p. 64)

*"But the king of Egypt said, 'Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to work!'"* - But the monarch was as unimpressed with their whining as he had been with their demands. He dismissed the entire matter as nothing more than an attempt by his slaves to shirk their responsibilities and avoid work. *"He replied in even harsher language than before, which contained not the slightest hint of reconsideration, but only arrogant rebuke."* (Cassuto, p. 67) Pharaoh

addresses Moses and Aaron by name which would suggest at least some level of awareness of their identity and of Moses' background in the royal household. Nonetheless, he contemptuously dismissed them as just two more slaves who need to be ordered back to work. Cassuto paraphrases the king's words in this way:

*“Moreover, he adds with arrogant presumption, that they themselves are obliged to do work, and they may not abstain from it. What do you think, that, because you are Moses and Aaron, the adopted son of my daughter and his brother, you can desist from labor? You, too, belong to the enslaved people. Get to your burdens.”* (Cassuto, p. 67)

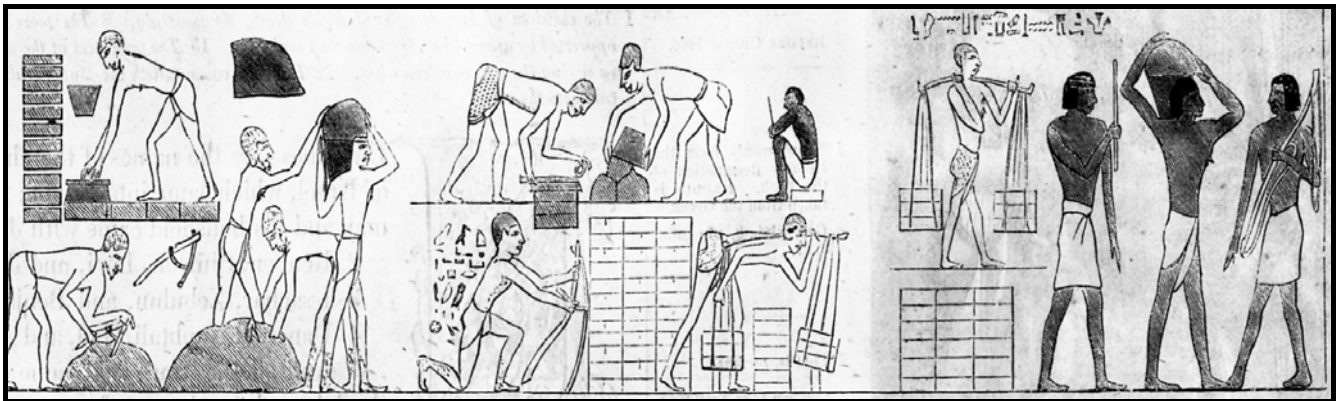
***“Then Pharaoh said, ‘Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working.’”*** - The king labels Moses and Aaron as nothing more than agitators who are guilty of distracting his slaves from their work. *“The Pharaoh's speech reeks with sarcasm.”* (Durham, p. 65) He notes the phenomenal growth of the Israelite nation in the context of stressing how much he stood to lose if he were to grant them the requested holiday. At the same time he disdainfully



*“The Bondage of Israel in Egypt” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*



refers to the Israelites as *“the people of the land.”* This was a derogatory term which was used by the aristocracy in reference to peasants or manual laborers.” The



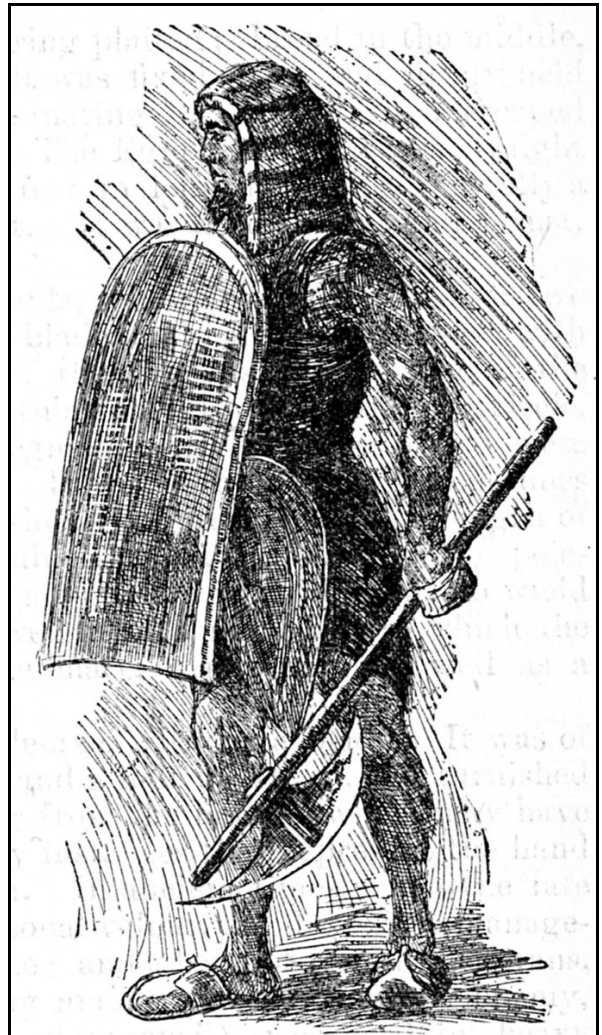
*“A Wall Painting of Brick Makers at Work in Ancient Egypt*

verb *“you are stopping”* is the Hebrew word *“sabat”* from which the word *“Sabbath”* is derived. The Egyptian tyrant is absolutely unwilling to allow his Hebrew slaves to enjoy a day of rest.

*“That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: ‘You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don’t reduce the quota. They are lazy; and that’s why they are crying out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’ Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.’”* - Pharaoh’s response to his initial visit with Moses and Aaron was devilishly clever, a classic example of a *“divide and conquer”* strategy. He immediately summoned *“the slave drivers and the foremen in charge of the people,”* that is, the Egyptian taskmasters who supervised the work of the slaves and the Israelite squad leaders who worked under them in actually managing the labor teams. The King had evidently decided that the Israelites had too much spare time if it was possible for them to listen to the schemes of troublemakers who proposed desert pilgrimages *“Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.”* As the old cliché advises, *“Idle hands are the devil’s playground.”* - *“They are lazy; and that’s why they are crying out, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’”* Pharaoh proposed to solve that problem by significantly increasing the workload of the Israelite slaves. At the same time, by presenting their added responsibilities as a consequence of Moses’ and Aaron’s demands, the monarch clearly hoped to cause resentment against them

and alienate them from their countrymen - *“so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies.”*

*“Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, ‘This is what Pharaoh says, ‘I will not give you anymore straw. Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.’”* - The specific mechanism which was chosen to implement this strategy of divide and conquer was to deprive the slaves of the straw needed to make their bricks without reducing the quotas of bricks which they were required to produce. Evidently, up to this time the straw for the bricks had been provided for the workers. The Pharaoh’s declaration personalized the issue - *“I will not give you any more straw”* - and in that way served to depict him as a beneficent father who has been betrayed by the ingratitude of his Hebrew servants. Since they had chosen to follow Moses and Aaron, Pharaoh could no longer provide for them. They would now have to gather their own straw while producing the same number of bricks. Pharaoh’s language was a sarcastic parody of the demand which Moses had presented. Moses had announced *“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, ‘Let My people go.’*” (Exodus 5:1) The Pharaoh used a variation of the same language to penalize the Israelites. Literally the message he conveyed to the taskmasters and foremen for the people was: *“This is what the Pharaoh says, I will not give you straw, therefore, you, yourselves go, get you straw.”* In effect, he was telling the Israelites - *“You wanted to go, but you will not be going to worship your God. Instead, you will be going to desperately gather the straw you will need from among the stubble. That’s what these troublemakers have brought upon you.”*



*“An Egyptian Soldier” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*



*“Pharaoh” by Barry Moser*

*“So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, ‘Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.’” - Bricks cannot be made without straw which served not only to bind the clay together but also to provides strength and elasticity.*

*“The straw or stubble was gathered from the field, chopped, and mixed in with the water-soaked clay. This substance played a crucial role in the brick making process. Its function was not just to act as a binding element. Through the action of the acid in the vegetable matter that was released in the course of chemical decay, the strength and plasticity of the brick were greatly enhanced. Without the addition of the chopped straw, the bricks would shrink, develop cracks, and lose their shape.” (Sarna, 2, p. 65)*

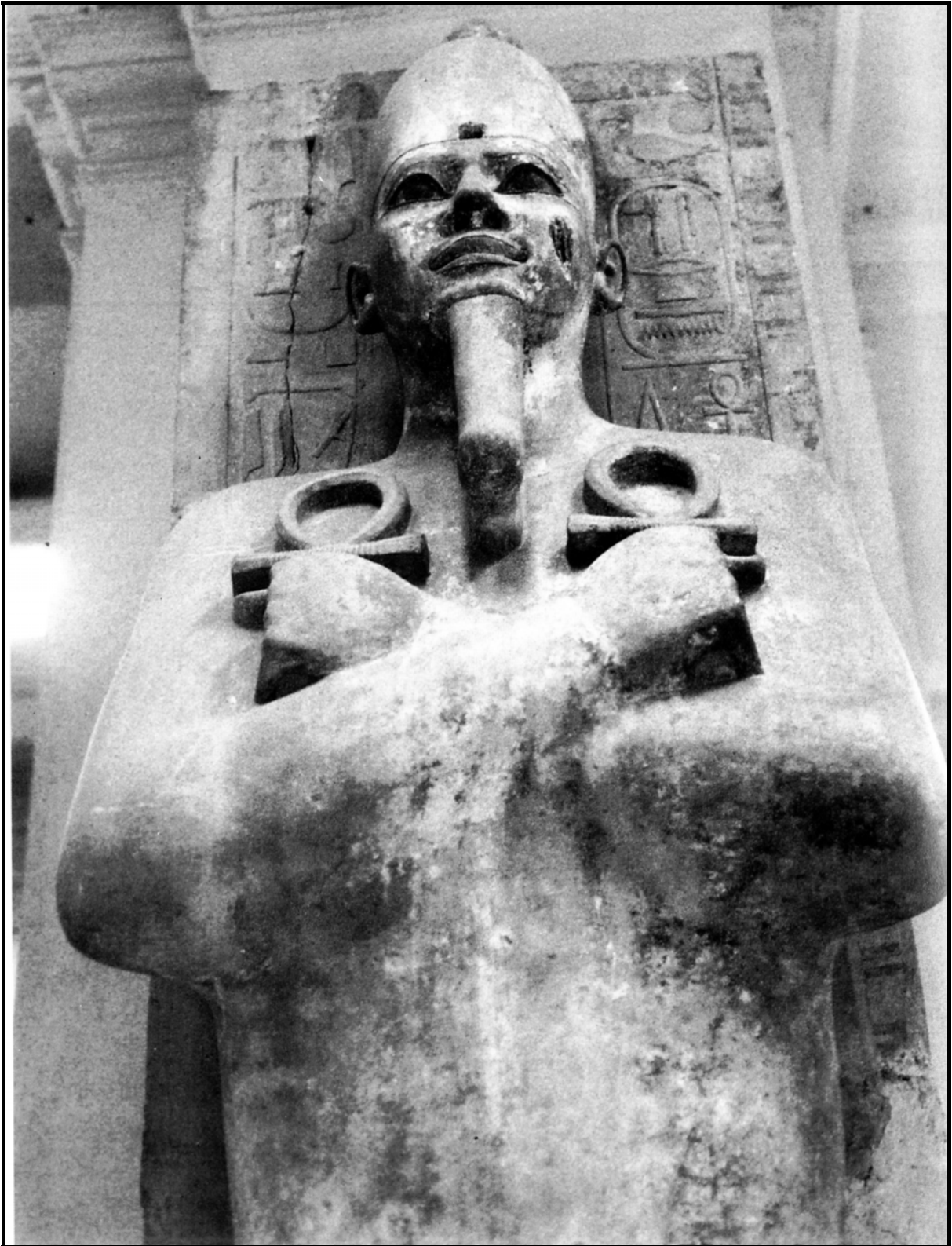
In an ancient papyrus document recently uncovered in Egypt an official of the Pharaoh complained that he had not been given the resources necessary to complete his task: *“I am staying at Kenenento, unequipped, and there are neither men to make bricks nor straw in the neighborhood.” (Ryken, p. 151)*

No straw, no bricks. That is the simple reality of the situation. Commentator William Propp provides this detailed description of the brick-makers craft as it continued to be practiced in pre-industrial Egypt in much the same way that it had been in ancient times:



*“A patch of ground roughly three to four meters on a side is dug up to the depth of twenty-five to thirty centimeters, the alluvium being broken up into small pieces. The proper amount of straw is scattered on top and water let into the area from canals dug for the purpose. The alluvium, straw, and water are thoroughly mixed together and allowed to stand for two or three days, until the mass becomes easily workable. The mud is carried on a round woven mat made of strips of palm leaf, having handles on opposite sides, and is placed where it is convenient for the brick-maker to reach it with the minimum of effort. There are usually two carriers and two brick-makers working from one trough of mix, and the mud paste is piled on a long heap between two makers in the amount that they will use as they work down the brick yard. The brick maker dips his hands into a jar of water, takes the mud for a single brick, the amount of which he has learned by experience, dips one hand in the water again and wets the outside of the lump and pushes it into the mold which is resting on the ground. The area has been dusted with fine dry mud and fine chaff, to prevent sticking to the ground. When the bricks are to be used for vaulting, the top is scored with two or three fingers to give a good key. The ancient bricks about the temple of Ramses II, which were larger than the modern ones, were scored with all the fingers of the hand. One brick having been molded, the mold is removed, placed on its side, and another brick struck. Thus, as the workman progresses, he covers the area with bricks, spaced the thickness of the mold apart. The brick-maker is a skilled craftsman and receives a higher wage as such. The brick-maker and his helper turn out two or three thousand bricks in the usual seven to eight hour day. The bricks are left in position for two or three days, then turned on side and end for three consecutive days to insure thorough drying. They are then loosely piled and cured for a minimum of ten to fifteen days, and usually for a month or more.” (Propp, p. 255)*

The language of the text emphasizes the urgency of Israel’s predicament. **“The people scattered”** - that is, they were desperately running in every direction, scurrying back and forth in search of the straw that was needed in order to complete their work. As slaves they had no resources of their own, so they were forced to scour fields that had already been harvested just to come up with **“the stubble”** - the scraps and fragments which were left over on the ground - to use for straw to bond their bricks. And, of course, this was all in addition to their already crushing work



*“Colossal Statue of Pharaoh Seti III as the Personification of the Great God Osiris”*

load as they were constantly pressed to maintain the same level of production which had prevailed when the necessary straw was provided for them - ***“The slave drivers kept pressing them saying, ‘Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw.’*** It was, by Pharaoh’s deliberate design, an impossible situation. It is important to remember the horrendous conditions under which these slaves were forced to work. Howard Vos summarized those conditions in this way:

*“They worked out in the hot Egyptian sun all day (often in temperatures over 100 degrees), driven to optimum production by their taskmasters...A wealthy Egyptian father talked with his son about the condition of their bricklayers. He observed that ‘their kidneys suffer because they are out in the sun...with no clothes on. Their hands are torn to ribbons by the cruel work. And they have knead all sorts of muck.’ It doe not take much imagination to conclude that the severe rigor imposed on the Hebrews resulted in many of them dying from dehydration, heat prostration, heatstroke, and the like.”* (Ryken , p. 153)

***“The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh’s slave drivers were beaten and were asked, ‘Why haven’t you met your quota of bricks yesterday or today as before?’”*** - The pressure to perform the impossible task which the King had demanded passed down the chain of command from Pharaoh to his ***“slave drivers,”*** and from the Egyptian slave drivers to the ***“Israelite foreman”*** who were directly responsible for the work gangs on the construction projects. Pharaoh is the absolute master of Egypt, god on earth, and his will is the law, no matter how unreasonable that will may be. He demonstrated his total mastery over Israel by the swift and relentless implementation of the royal decree that the slaves were to produce the same number of bricks without the provision of straw. The ***“Israelite foremen”*** who had been placed over their own people by ***“Pharaoh’s slave drivers”*** bear the brunt of the King’s wrath over the failure of his slaves to meet their assigned ***“quota of bricks.”*** These ***“Quislings”*** are caught in the middle and they will vent their fury on the defenseless slaves beneath them. The helpless degradation of Israel is pathetically revealed. John Currin aptly summarizes the significance of these events as follows:

*“Because of this failure the foremen are thrashed. They are responsible for the amount of work done, and they will press their own people to work harder. The sorry condition of the Hebrews is affirmed again. Out of sheer spite, they are required to do what is impossible and then severely punished when they are unable to complete the tasks given to*



*them. Here is a complete degradation of the mass of Hebrew workers. Moses and Aaron have provided Pharaoh with a reason to destroy the people of God, and he takes every advantage.” (Currin, I, p. 129)*

The administrative structure which is described in the text, flowing from the royal palace through Egyptian supervisors to Israelite taskmasters who actually managed the work of the slaves was common throughout the ancient world. It was brutally effective in managing captive populations and suppressing any possibility of resistance or rebellion. *“The Egyptian hierarchy of superiors and underlings is well documented. It is typical under such oppressive systems that those who rank just above the slaves are recruited from among the slaves themselves...The temporary ease of their own agony that their promotion meant led to a double contempt both from their superiors and from those whom they were forced to oppress.” (Larsson, p. 46)*



*“Bricks Without Straw” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*



*“The Taskmasters at Work” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*

### ***The Success of Pharaoh’s Strategy Exodus 5:15-21***

*Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh; “Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten but the fault is with your own people.” Pharaoh said, “Lazy, that’s what you are - lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.” The Israelite foremen realized that they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses*

*and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, “May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”*

*“Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: ‘Why have you treated your servants this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.’”*

The afflicted foremen *“appealed to Pharaoh.”* This, no doubt, means that a delegation representing the foreman presented itself at the court of the king. The verb *“appealed”* means *“to cry out for relief in a distressful, trying situation.”* It is tragically significant to note that these treacherous bullies did not cry out to the Lord in their distress, thereby acknowledging His Sovereign power and authority. Instead they ran to Pharaoh for relief, and as they groveled before this earthly king they repeatedly expressed their loyalty and subservience to him. Three times in the course of their plea, they identified themselves as *“your servants.”* The foreman politely protested that as dutiful servants of their royal master they had been treated unfairly. Of course, they did not dare to directly accuse the Pharaoh himself of this unfairness. Instead, they suggested that the fault was with their Egyptian supervisors and they appealed to the beneficent monarch to correct this injustice of which he himself could not have been aware. *“Why have you treated your servants in this way? Your servants are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks! Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.’”*

*“Pharaoh said, ‘Lazy, that’s what you are - lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the Lord.’ Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.”* - The foremen’s servile ploy was a complete failure. Pharaoh rejected their professions of loyalty and harshly condemned them as *“Lazy!”* He cleverly presented his attack as the direct consequence of Moses’ demand that the people be released to *“go and sacrifice to the Lord.”* In this way he guaranteed that Moses would be the target of their anger.

The King ordered them back to work immediately and sternly repeated his decree that no straw would be provided for them while their brick quotas remained unchanged. Nahum Sarna summarizes the grim result of the episode in this way:

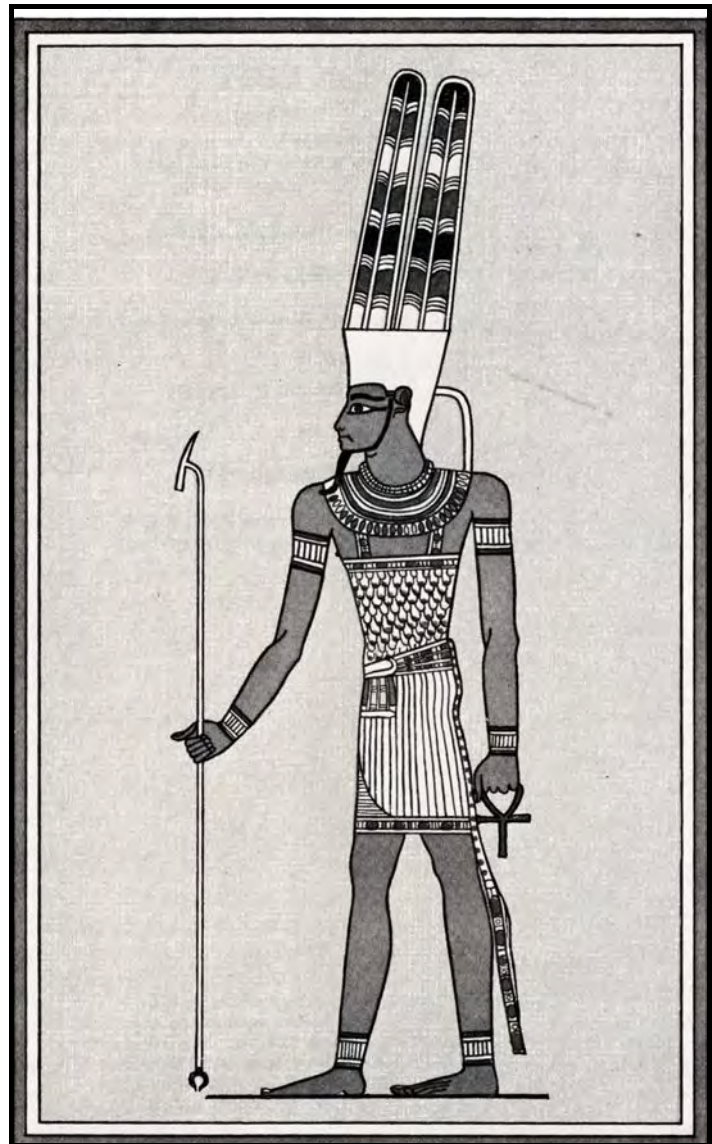
*‘The Israelite foremen of the labor gangs who were responsible to the Egyptian taskmasters obviously could not supply the assigned quotas and were administered beatings in punishment for their failure to do so. They organized a protest and sent a delegation to the court but it met*



*with unfeeling rebuff and harsh insult.” (Sarna, 2, p.66)*

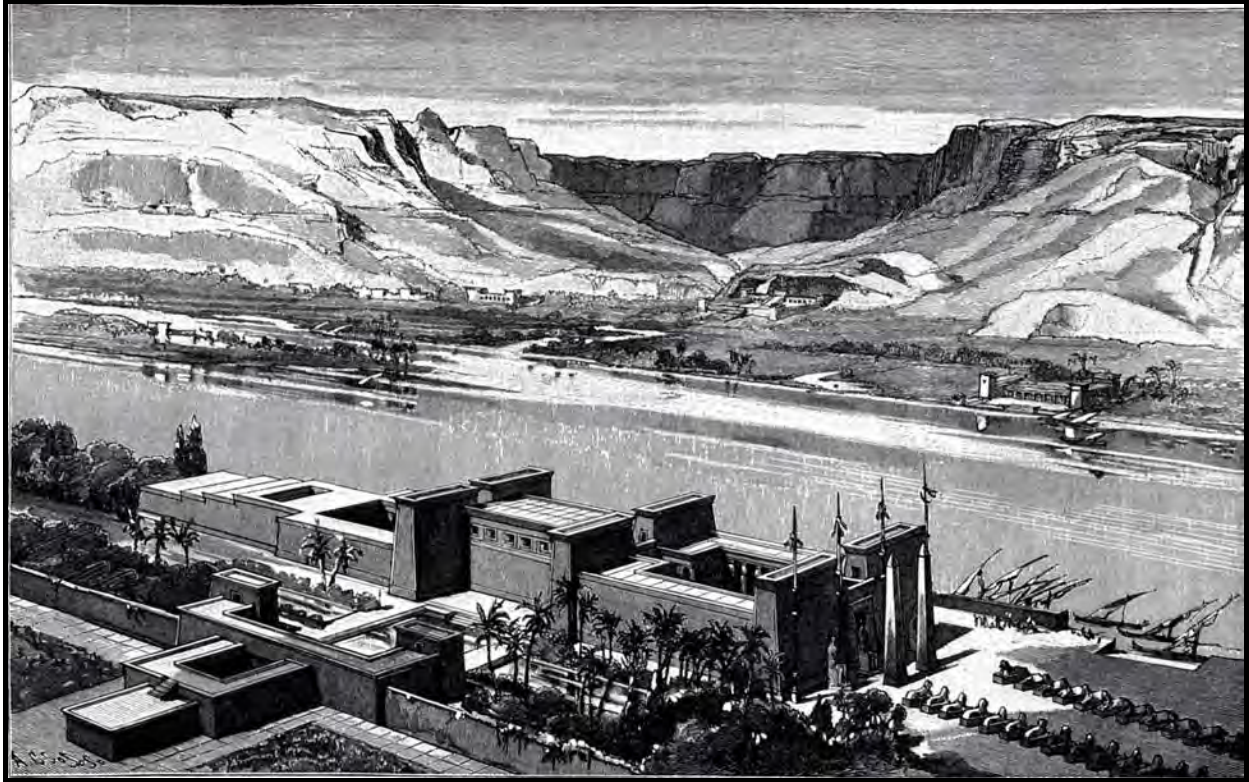
***“The Israelite foremen recognized that they were in trouble when they were told, ‘You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you each day.’”*** - After their personal encounter with the Pharaoh, the foremen realized the full scope of their dilemma and the personal jeopardy in which these circumstances placed them. It was clear that Pharaoh’s position was completely non-negotiable - no straw but no reduction in the brick quotas. They also recognized that the Pharaoh’s demand was completely unrealistic - it could not be done. In the Hebrew text, the phrase ***“they were in trouble”*** literally reads ***“they were in evil.”*** The Hebrew word for “evil” in this phrase is “ra” and its use may well be an deliberate allusion to one of the chief gods of the Egyptian pantheon, the sun god, Amun Ra. The reference becomes more pointed when we note that the Pharaoh himself was regarded as the earthly incarnation of Ra. In this way through the clever use of this particular Hebrew word for evil, the language of the foremen suggests that their predicament is because they have fallen into the power of idolatrous followers of Ra, who are led by an evil man who believes himself to be the very personification of Ra.

***“When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron...”*** - Evidently Moses and Aaron had stationed themselves outside the palace, anxiously awaiting the outcome of the foremen’s audience with the King. That pathetic fact,



***“Amun Ra - The Egyptian God of the Sun”***





*“The Great Temple of Amun Ra at Karnak on the Nile” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving*

in itself, is indicative of their lack of confidence in their mission. The ensuing confrontation indicated that these men did not view the stubborn intransigence of Pharaoh who had denied and defied their God to be the source of their difficulties. Instead, the taskmasters wasted no time in venting their anger and frustration upon Moses and Aaron, the two men whom they perceived to be the cause of their problems. The verb **“found”** which describes their encounter with Moses and Aaron carries a strongly negative connotation in Hebrew. It means *“to confront, assail, or attack.”* This was not going to be a cordial conversation.

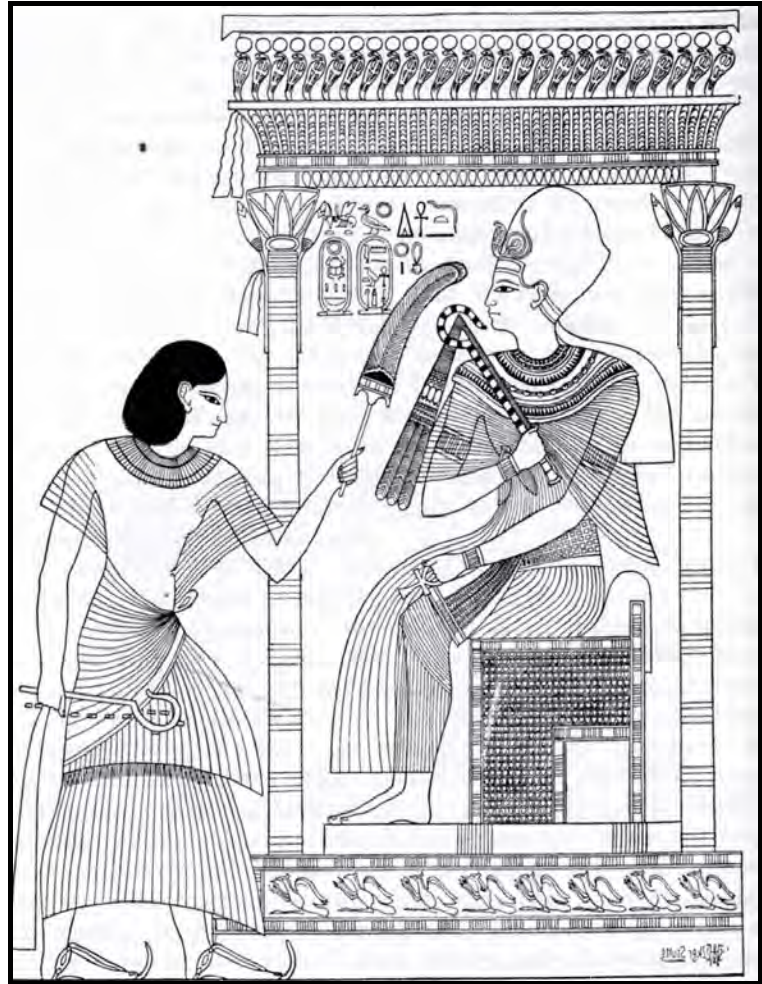
**“May the Lord look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh...”** - Moses and Aaron had promised deliverance in the Name of the Lord. Instead, the result of their intervention appeared to be increased oppression. The foremen therefore concluded that these two men must have been false prophets and they called down the judgment of God upon them - **“May the Lord look upon you and judge you.”** Their words demand that God punish the lying prophets who had professed to speak for Him when in truth they did not, and whose lies had brought such calamitous jeopardy not only upon the taskmasters themselves, but upon the

entire Israelite nation. Their colorful phrase - ***“you have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his servants”*** - literally states *“You have caused our breath to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and his courtiers.”* This vividly mixed metaphor (linking odor and eyes) is a most forceful way of saying *“you have destroyed our reputation,”* *“you have brought us into contempt.”* Ironically, the same word for ***“stench”*** will recur a few verses later to describe the stink that arises after the Nile has been turned to blood in the first plague (cf. Exodus 7:18).

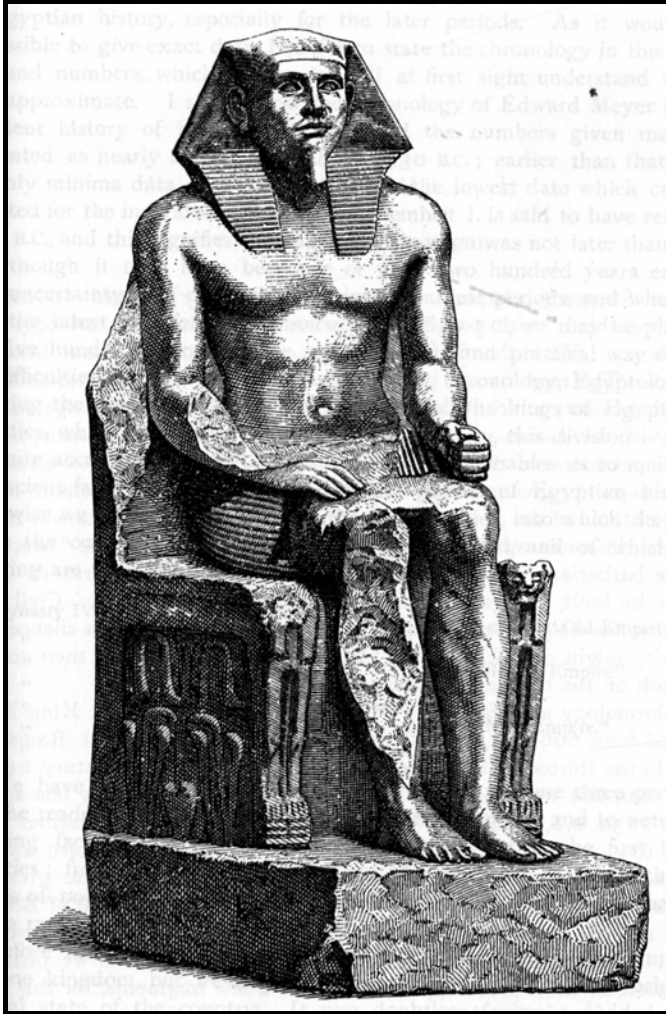
***“And have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”*** - From the taskmasters’ perspective Moses and Aaron had promised deliverance, but instead they had brought down a threat of imminent death and destruction.

Their demands had provided Pharaoh with all the pretext he needed to exterminate the people. By giving the King the excuse he may have been looking for, the foremen complained, Moses and Aaron had ***“put a sword in their hand to kill us”*** and now the Israelite nation found itself in a position of mortal jeopardy.

Moses and Aaron offer no rebuttal. They have been condemned as false prophets. Yet they do not argue or contest the dire accusations which have been hurled against them by the taskmasters. Instead they scurry away in desperation and despair. This episode is certainly the lowest moment in the course of the story of the deliverance of



***“An Audience Before Pharaoh” The Hieroglyphic Inscription Identifies Pharaoh as “The King of Upper and Lower Egypt, the God Ra for All Beings”***



***“Pharaoh Chephrem the Great”  
Granite Statue in the Cairo Museum***

Israel from bondage in Egypt. The most amazing part of this sad narrative is the success of Pharaoh’s masterful manipulation of the situation. Later in the narrative, this same ruler will reveal himself to be a stubborn fool who brings destruction down upon himself and his people. But at this point the King appears as a clever and resourceful leader who showed great skill in playing his enemies off against one another. His goals were to undermine the leadership of Moses and Aaron and to cause division and disagreement among the Israelites. By the end of Exodus 5, the King of Egypt has effectively accomplished both of those goals. William Propp offers this perceptive assessment of the situation:

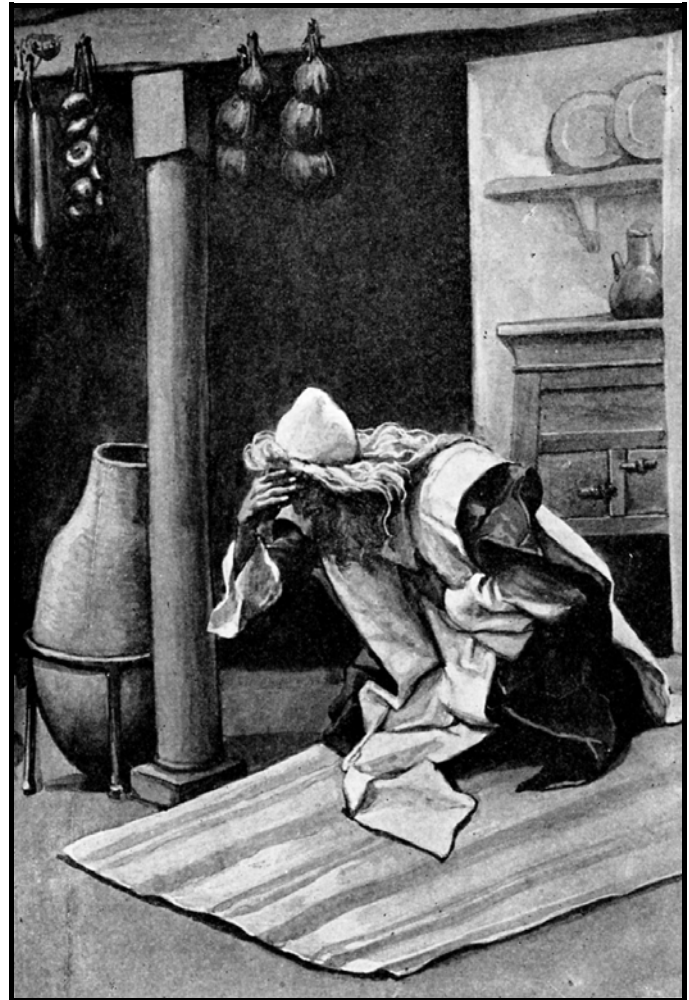
*“The division in the Hebrew ranks is the triumph of Pharaoh’s policy. By making Israel’s servitude even harsher, the king impugns Moses’*

*claim to a divine charter, magic tricks notwithstanding. With consummate cunning, he appoints the Hebrew’s own clan leaders to mediate Egyptian control, both strengthening and undermining their position...The officers also undercut Moses’ efforts by seeking not a liberation, but mere relief from the increased workload. As a result, the officers and the people resent one another, and all blame Moses and Aaron. Thus, while Pharaoh will later appear stupid, he is initially portrayed as a ruthless and effective strike-buster.” (Propp, p. 260)*



## *The Renewal of Moses' Commission to Deliver Israel* *Exodus 5:22-6:12*

*Moses returned to the Lord and said, "O Lord, why have You brought trouble upon this people? Is this why You sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." Then the Lord said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: because of My mighty hand he will let them go; because of My mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." God also said to Moses, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My Name, the Lord, I did not make Myself known to them. I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered My covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, and to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.'" Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." But*



*"God Reassures Moses" by J. James Tissot*

*Moses said to the Lord, “If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?”*

*“Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘O Lord, why have You brought trouble...’ - Evidently, Moses himself doubted the justice of God. Instead of going back to the King as he had originally intended, the reluctant prophet retreated to a secluded place and immediately lodged his complaint with the Lord (Hebrew “Adonai”). He*



*“Bricks Without Straw” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration*

accused God of having *“brought trouble upon this people.”* Moses used the same Hebrew noun (“*ra*”) which the Israelite foremen had utilized in their complaint to Pharaoh. *“In the bitterness of his soul, he dares to reproach the Lord in words of despair.”* (Cassuto, p. 73) God had called him to be the deliverer, but what he had brought upon the people was not deliverance but the intensification of their misery. Moses laid the blame for all this at the feet of God: *“Ever since I went to Pharaoh to*

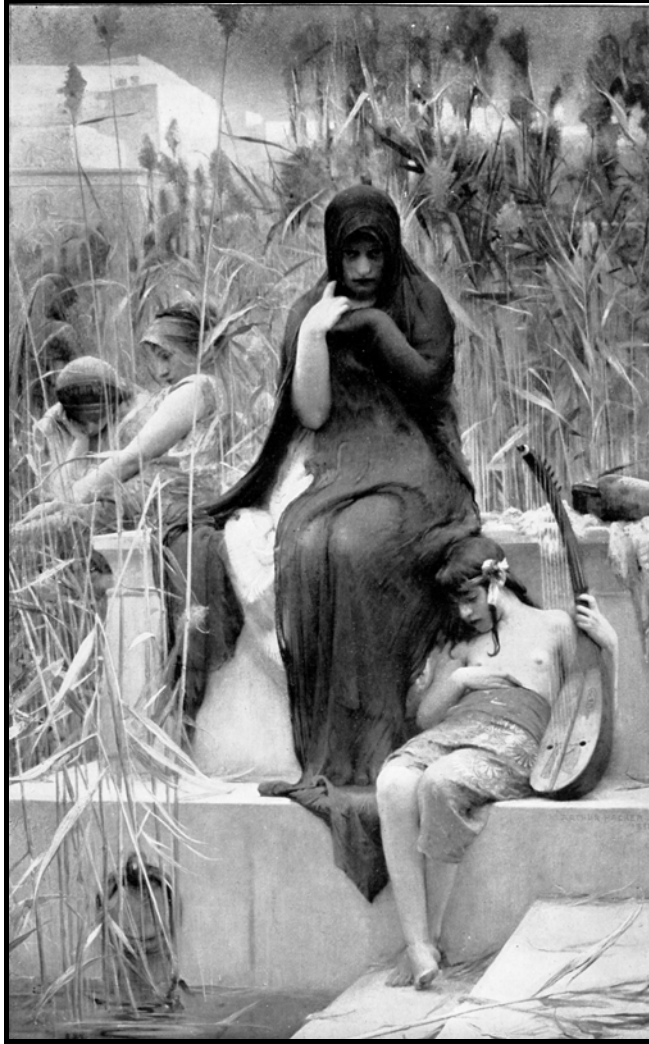
*“speak in Your Name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and You have not rescued your people at all.”* The depth of Moses’ distress is revealed by the boldness with which he directly accused God of having failed to keep His promises. A stinging series of six personal pronouns emphasize the intensity of Moses sense of having been betrayed and misled by God. The substance of his complaint is that he had done what God commanded him to do but God had not what He promised Moses He would do. *“The prophet’s words are pointed and sharp. Yahweh has not done what He said He would do.”* (Currid, p. 135)

*“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh...’* - God’s response to Moses’ complaint was immediate and emphatic. He did not rebuke His frustrated spokesman. Instead, He assured him that events were unfolding exactly as the Ruler of all history had intended. The Lord encouraged Moses not to be deceived or discouraged by the Pharaoh’s futile demonstrations of power. This earthly king was nothing more than a pawn in the hand of God. His defiance would only serve to demonstrate the almighty power of God and to magnify His holy Name. When the *“mighty hand”* of God was finished with this little man, he would not only allow the Israelites go free, he would *“drive them out of his country.”* God assured Moses that His divine plan for the deliverance of His people had not failed or faltered. He needed only to obey God’s command, trust in the fulfillment of His promises, and confidently await the accomplishment of His purpose.

*“God also said to Moses. ‘I am the Lord..’* - The solemn words which God here proclaimed to Moses reaffirmed his calling as the deliverer of Israel which had originally taken place at the burning bush where God had revealed His sacred Name (cf. Exodus 3:14). The formal announcement - *“I am the Lord”* (literally - *“I am Yahweh”*) was intended to remind Moses of the nature of the God whom he had been called to serve. The invocation of *“Yahweh,”* the sacred Name of God, and the reverent awe which it evoked, was designed to dispel his discouragement and despair and recall him to the task which still remained to be done. This is the characteristic language used by rulers of the era in royal edicts. *“Such a formula was customary in the ancient East in the declarations of kings, when proclaiming their deeds and might as their inscriptions testify.”* (Cassuto, p. 76)

*“I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My Name, the Lord, I did not make Myself known to them.”* - The familiar patriarchal enumeration *“to Abraham,, to Isaac and to Jacob”* occurs seventeen times in the





*“By the Rivers of Babylon” by Arthur Hacker*

Pentateuch. The first time it was used was in Joseph’s deathbed promise to his brothers: ***“Then Joseph said to his brothers: ‘I am about to die, but God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land He promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’”*** (Genesis 50:24) Its use here serves not only to place the deliverance from Egyptian bondage in the context of God’s promises to the patriarchs, but also to remind Moses that God’s promises are long term. Often they are not fulfilled immediately and require patient trust as the purpose of God is accomplished.

***“But by My Name, the Lord, I did not make Myself known to them.”*** -To *“know the Name of the Lord”* in Scripture means to recognize the unique identity of the Lord as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. Only those who have witnessed His sovereign power at work can truly

*“know the Name of the Lord.”* This understanding of the phrase can be clearly seen in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. For example, thru His prophet Isaiah God foretold the end of the Babylonian Captivity with the promise that His people would again ***“know My Name”*** as they experienced His power in their deliverance:

***“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘At first My people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. And now, what do I have here?’ declares the Lord. ‘For My people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,’ declares the Lord. ‘And all day long My Name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore, My people will know My Name; therefore, in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.’”*** (Isaiah 52:4-6)

Using the same language, God predicted thru the prophet Jeremiah that on the coming of the great Day of Judgement all the nations which had spurned and rejected Him would acknowledge His Name as they witnesses the unmistakable demonstration of His divine power: ***“Therefore, I will teach them - this time I will teach them My power and might. Then they will know that My Name is the Lord.”*** (“Yahweh”) (Jeremiah 16:21) The Lord also recalled His revelation of Himself as “Yahweh” to the Children of Israel thru the mighty deeds of their deliverance from bondage in Egypt when he spoke through the prophet Ezekiel:

***“This is what the Sovereign Lord says, ‘On the day I chose Israel I swore with uplifted hand to the descendants of the House of Jacob and revealed Myself to them in Egypt. With uplifted hand I said to them, I am the Lord your God. On that day I swore to them that I would bring them out of Egypt into a land I had searched out for them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most beautiful of all lands.’*** (Ezekiel 20:5-6)

God indicated to Moses that He had ***“appeared”*** to the patriarchs as ***“God Almighty”*** (Hebrew - *“El Shaddai,”* ***“but by My Name, the Lord*** (Hebrew - *“Yahweh”*) ***I did not make Myself known to them.”*** With these words God promised Moses that he and the Children of Israel were about to witness an unprecedented demonstration of His divine power, unlike anything that had been experienced by the patriarchs of old. He would deliver them from bondage in Egypt, establish them as a nation, and give them the rich and abundant land which had been promised to their forefathers. As the beneficiary of these mighty acts of God, Israel would come to know Him as ***“the Lord”*** (“Yahweh”) in a way that no other people had yet known Him.



***“The Prophet Jeremiah”***

***“I also established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens.”*** - One of the core components of the **“covenant”** which God has established with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was the promise that they would possess the land of Canaan as their own.

***”The Lord said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Lift up your eyes from***

*where you are and look north and south, east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever.’* (Genesis 13:14-15)



***“Abraham and Isaac” by S. Solomon Delt***

***“He also said to him, ‘I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it...To your descendants I give this land, from the River of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates - the land of the Kenites, Kennizites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perrizites, Rephites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.’*** (Genesis 15: 7,18-20)

***“The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you, and I will be their God.”*** (Genesis 17:8)

***“The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, ‘I will be with you and bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.’”*** (Genesis 26:4)



God noted that during the generations of Abraham and his descendants throughout all of the years that they lived in the land of Canaan, they never actually possessed the land as their own - ***“where they lived as aliens.”*** The Hebrew reinforces the point by repeating varieties of the same word (*“megurim”*) twice, literally - *“sojournings in which they sojourned”* An ***“alien”*** is a stranger, an outsider who does not enjoy the benefits of permanent residence. This language reflects that of Genesis 17:8 where God had promised Abraham - ***“The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you, and your descendants after you, and I will be their God.”*** Moses had also utilized a form of this term in the name which he bestowed upon Gershom, his oldest son: ***“Moses named him Gershom, saying, ‘I have become an alien in a foreign land.’”*** (Exodus 2:22)



***“Israelite Bondage in Egypt” by Robert Leinweber***

***“Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered My covenant.”*** - God here repeated directly to Moses the previous observation of Exodus 2:24 - ***“God heard their groaning, and He remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.”*** (cf. Notes,





***“Pharaoh in his War Chariot Triumphantly Destroying the Enemies of Egypt”  
Wall Painting from the Tomb of Pharaoh Seti I***

pp. 64-66) This personal revelation to Moses provided the prophet with the rare privilege of a glimpse into the divine counsels of heaven. *“It is as though there was explicitly revealed to Moses what had transpired in the Court on high.”* (Cassuto, p. 80) **“Groaning”** is the Old Testament’s characteristic term to describe the lament of God’s people in times of persecution. So also the Book of Judges reported: **“For the Lord had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.”** (Judges 2:18) As previously indicated (cf. Notes, p.66), the phrase **“I have remembered My covenant”** meant that God was ready to put the covenant and its promises into effect. The time for divine intervention had come.

**“Therefore say to the Israelites; ‘I am the Lord...’”** - The introduction in the preceding verses had clearly established the covenant context of God’s impending action. The description of the action which now follows is linked to that introduction with the conjunction **“therefore”** which identifies the action as the result of the preceding statements, that is, the implementation of God’s covenant promises to His people. The divine promise of deliverance repeats the formal affirmation **“I am the Lord.”** (literally - *“I am Yahweh”*) with which God had previously opened this conversation with Moses (cf. Exodus 6:2). John Currid aptly described these majestic words as *“the royal formula of self-identification.”* (Currid, p. 139) They are the words of a mighty king, a king who has the power to put his words into action.

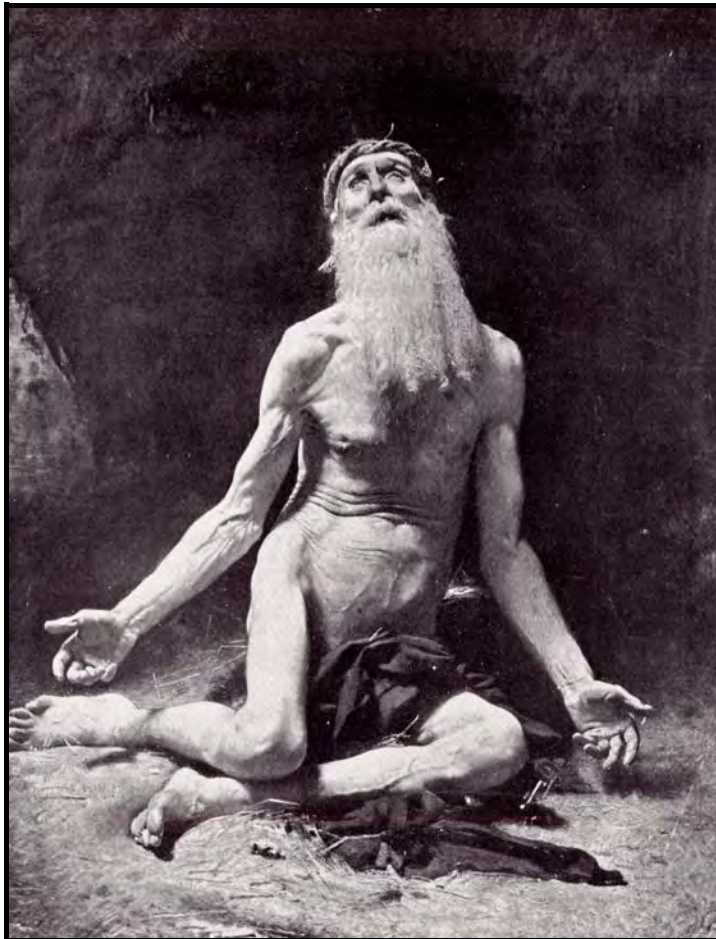
**“and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians...”** - A striking series

of seven first person singular verbs describe the substance of that which God promises to do for His covenant people - ***“I will bring you out...I will free you...and will redeem you...I will take you as My own people and I will be your God...And I will bring you to the land...I will give it you as a possession.”*** The Hebrew text emphasizes the connectedness of this series of actions by preceding each of the verbs with the conjunction “waw” (“and”). The first three phrases address the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt - ***“I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgement.”*** The verbal imagery of the opening phrase - ***“I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians”*** - depicts the Children of Israel as an overloaded beast of burden which is being crushed beneath the heavy weight that has been placed upon it. The text literally says - ***“I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”*** God promises to cause the dreadful weight of Egyptian oppression - ***“the yoke of the Egyptians”*** (NIV); ***“the crush of the Egyptians”*** (Durham); ***“the burdens of the Egyptians”*** (Cassuto) - to be lifted off of their weary shoulders. The phrase which follows explains and expands the thought - ***“I will free you from being slaves to them.”*** The Israelites had come to Egypt of their own free will as honored guests of the Pharaoh (cf.



***“The Arrival of Jacob in Egypt” 18<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving by W.H. Egleton***

Genesis 46:1-7, 26-34; 47:1-12). Now God promised to restore that freedom which had been deceitfully taken from them as the descendants of Jacob and Joseph had been enslaved by the Egyptians. The phrase in the original reads - *“and I will free you out of their bondage.”* John Mackay notes the specific meaning of this verb: *“‘Free’ is the same word that was translated as ‘rescue’ earlier (2:19). It conveys the idea of snatching away from the grasp of another person or a situation of peril by exercising superior power.”* (Mackay, p. 121)



*“Job in his Affliction - ‘I Know That My Redeemer Liveth’” by Leon Bonnat*

The segment’s third phrase - *“and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and mighty acts of judgement”* - introduces a verb of profound theological significance in the Old Testament. The verb *“redeem”* referred specifically to the obligation of a close relative or kinsman to act on behalf of a member of his family who had fallen into danger or distress. The *“redeemer”* (Hebrew - *“go-el”*) *“was the near kin who had primary responsibility for protecting and regaining persons and property for the extended family.”* (Sarna, p. 32) The Hebrew word literally means *“vindicator”* or *“defender.”* The *“go-el”* in the Mosaic Code was the next of kin whose duty it was to redeem a captive or enslaved relative (Genesis 14:14-16); to buy back his sold or otherwise forfeited inheritance (Leviticus 25:25-26); to

avenge the death of murdered kinsman (Numbers 35:12); or to marry his childless widow (Deuteronomy 25:5). The startling significance of the term’s use in this instance is that by this promise to redeem the nation, God is acknowledging a family relationship and obligation with Israel! *“Here the Lord is committing Himself to act*



to free the Israelites because of the relationship that the covenant has created between Him and them.” (Mackay, p. 121) The title “redeemer” takes on clear Messianic significance as a title of the divine Savior whom God will send “buy back” the world from the curse of death and sin with a redemption price paid in His own blood. Thus did the Patriarch Job declare in the midst of his affliction:

***“I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”*** (Job 19:25-27)

“Yahweh” is repeatedly described as the “Redeemer” (“go-el”) of Israel throughout the balance of the Old Testament on the basis of His deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt. For example, the Psalmist declares: ***“He did miracles in the sight of their fathers in the land of Egypt...He divided the sea and led them through; He made the water stand firm like a wall...They remembered that God was their Rock, that God Most High was their Redeemer.”*** (Psalm 78:12-13, 35; cf. 19:14; Isaiah 41:14; 43:14)

The means of divine redemption in this instance are ***“an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement.”*** The extended arm of God is a metaphor of

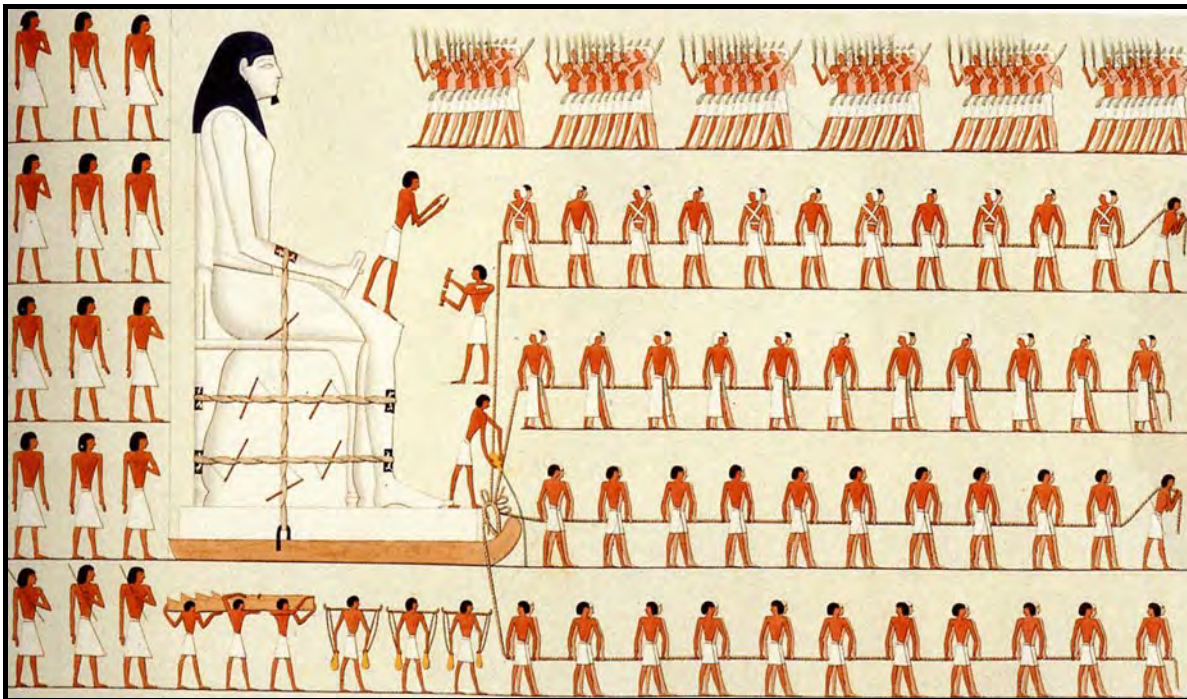


***“Egyptian Dancer in the Court of Pharaoh”  
by H. Mackart***



divine power in action. *“Many poetic passages in the Bible speak of the Lord’s mighty arm as the means used for bringing divine retribution on the wicked and for delivering the righteous from their hand.”* (Cassuto, p. 80) This vividly anthropomorphic imagery is used later in Exodus to describe the deliverance from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan: *“And the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.”* (Exodus 7:5) In the jubilant *“Song of Moses,”* the prophet celebrated the power of the arm of the Lord as that power was demonstrated in the destruction of the host of Pharaoh in the Red Sea: *“Terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of Your arm they will be as still as stone - until Your people pass by.”* (Exodus 15:16) The same colorful language occurs later in Psalm 89 where the Psalmist celebrated the mighty power of God which delivered His people:

*“With Your strong arm you scattered Your enemies...Your arm is endued with power; Your right hand is strong; Your right hand is exalted...Once You spoke in a vision, to Your faithful people You said...’My hand will sustain him; surely My arm will strengthen him. No enemy will subject him to tribute; no wicked man will oppress him.’”* (Psalm 89: 10,13, 19, 21-22)



*“Slaves Dragging a Colossal Stone Statue of Pharaoh from the Quarry”  
Tomb Painting from c. 2000 B.C.*

The phrase **“with mighty acts of judgement”** serves to remind the reader that the punishments which were about to come upon the land of Egypt were neither capricious nor arbitrary. God’s judgements upon Egypt were **“the righteous acts of the Judge of the whole earth, who requites the wicked man according to his wickedness, and delivers from his hand the righteous who are subjected to his yoke.”** (Cassuto, p. 81) The horrible plagues which would be visited upon Pharaoh and his people were richly deserved, the appropriate consequence of the corruption and wickedness of their cruel oppression of the descendants of Jacob. The reference to judgement here is an allusion to God’s previous promise to Abraham - **“And also the nation that they will serve as slaves I am going to judge.”** (Genesis 15:14)

**“I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”** -

The next two verbs in the series define the relationship between God and His people. The liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt was to become the foundational reality upon which the Lord’s covenant relationship with His people would be based. Over and over again across the centuries, as God addressed the Israelites, He would be identified as **“the Lord Who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness.”** (Jeremiah 2:6; cf. also i.e. Leviticus 26:13; Deuteronomy 4:20; 6:21-22; 26:8; Joshua 24:6; Judges 6:8; 1 Samuel 8:8; 2 Samuel 7:6; 1 Kings 8:21; 9:9; 2 Chronicles 6:5; Jeremiah 7:22; 11:4; Ezekiel 20:6;



**“Depictions of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel - the Four Great Prophets”  
Engraving from an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Luther Bible**



Daniel 9:15; Hosea 11:1). It is God Himself who initiates and establishes His covenant with Israel - ***“I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God.”*** *“This phrase, or its equivalent, is employed throughout the Bible as the heart of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Hebrews.”* (Currid, p. 140)

***“I will put My dwelling place among you and will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God and you will be My people.”***  
(Leviticus 26:12)

***“But I gave them this command: ‘Obey Me and I will be your God, and you will be My people. Walk in all the ways that I command you that it may go well with you.’”*** (Jeremiah 7:23)

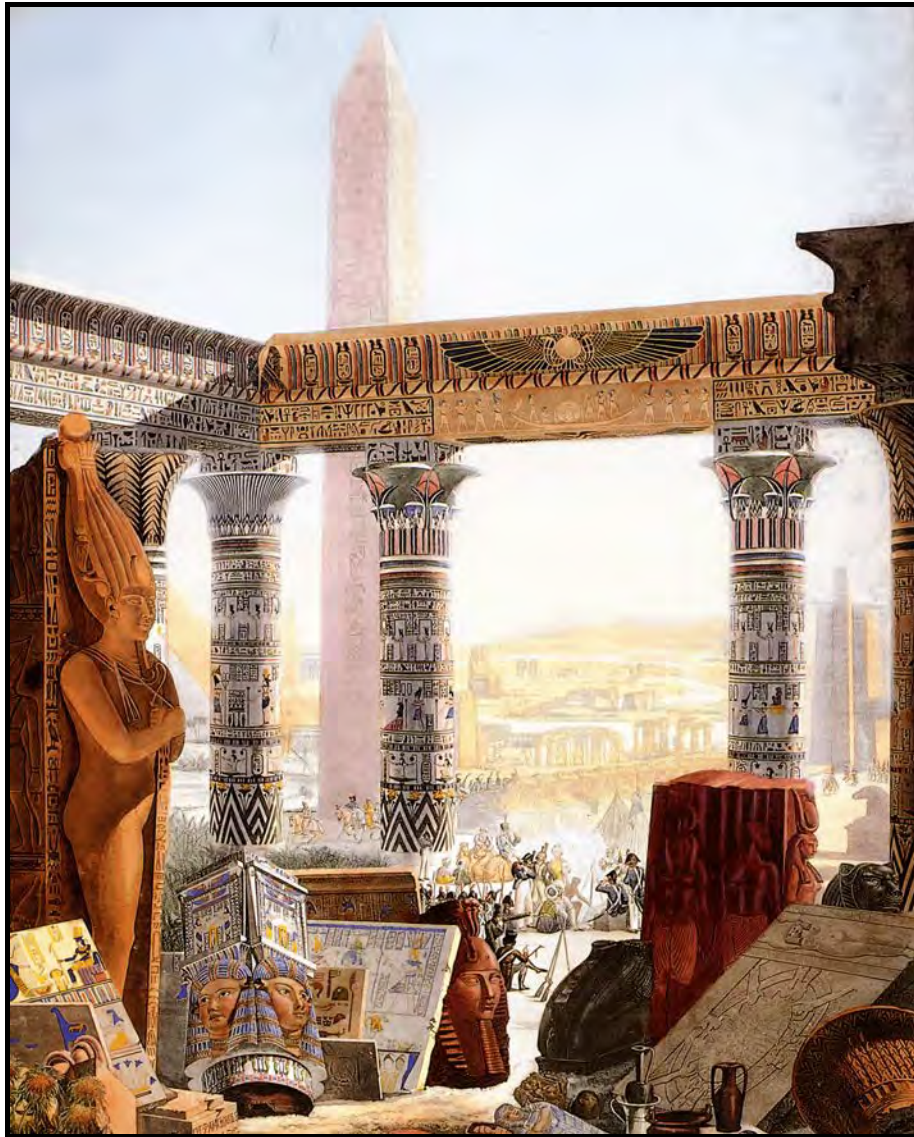
***“The terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace. I said, ‘Obey Me and do everything I command you and you will be My people and I will be your God.’”*** (Jeremiah 11:4)

***“I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with all their heart.”*** (Jeremiah 24:7)

***“I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws. They will be My people and I will be their God.”*** (Ezekiel 11:19-20)

***“I will save My people from the countries of the East and the West. I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be My people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God.”*** (Zechariah 8:7-8)

When God declares ***“I will take you as My people and I will be your God”*** - His words imply an unprecedented intimacy between God and the people whom He had chosen to be His own. These two verbs *“to take”* and *“to be someone’s”* are both



*“19<sup>th</sup> Century Engraving of Egyptian Temple Ruins”*

characteristically used in the context of matrimony. At the same time, they suggest mutual responsibility - blessing and care on the part of God, and obedience and loyalty on the part of the people. This intimate mutual relationship is exactly what God had previously promised to father Abraham at the time when the covenant was first established: ***“I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.”*** (Genesis 17:7)

***“Then you will know that I am the Lord your God Who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”*** - As previously noted (cf. Notes, p. 175) the deliverance

of Israel from Egyptian bondage became the foundational event of the Old Testament covenant. The Hebrew verb “yada” (“to know”) does not refer to abstract, theoretical knowledge. It is used in reference to profoundly personal, experiential knowledge. In that sense, “yada” (“to know”) frequently occurs in the Hebrew text as a euphemism to describe the act of sexual intercourse - (i.e. Genesis 4:1 - **“And Adam knew his wife, Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain.”**) Accordingly, when God declares **“you will know that I am the Lord your God”** He is promising that Israel



**“God’s Promise to Abraham”**  
**by Frederick Lord Leighton**

will personally experience His love demonstrated in action on their behalf. Because of that experience, they will recognize God’s personal commitment to them and will acknowledge Him as **“the Lord (“Yahweh”) your God”**. The nature of this defining demonstration of God’s love for His chosen people is specifically expressed in the phrase - **“who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”** These words are a repetition of promise previously stated in Verse 6 - **“I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians”** which had colorfully described Israel’s slavery as a heavy burden beneath which the people were being crushed by the Egyptians.

**“And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham...”** - The promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants had been a central component of the covenant from the

very beginning. In Genesis 12:7 God had announced to Abraham - **“To your offspring I will give this land.”** That promise had been reaffirmed many times and the repetition of the promise is suggested here by the reference to all of the patriarchs



***“to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.”*** (cf. Genesis 13:15,17; 15:18; 17:8) The crucial importance of this dimension of the covenant is reinforced by the phrase - ***“I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.”*** The action of raising the hand, specifically the right hand (cf. Isaiah 62:8; Revelation 10:5-6), toward heaven signified the solemnity of the promise and the willingness of the oath-taker to summon heaven itself as witness to his commitment and as the agent of his judgement should the oath be broken or false. This practice prevailed throughout the Biblical era (cf. Genesis 14:22; Deuteronomy 32:4; Daniel 12:7) and has persisted into the modern era. The inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly emphasized the unique importance of God’s oath to Abraham and his descendants:

***“When God made His promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for Him to swear by, He swore by Himself, saying, ‘I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.’ And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised. Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make***



***“Abraham Enters the Promised Land” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld***

*the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, He confirmed it with an oath. God did this, so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.”*  
(Hebrews 6:13-18)



*“Israelite Slaves Build the Treasure Cities of Pharaoh” by Arnold Friberg*

*“I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.”* - The Children of Israel would no longer sojourn in the land of Canaan as strangers, traveling nomads in a territory which actually belonged to others. Instead, God promised that He would bestow actual ownership of the land upon them as a gracious gift - *“I will give it to you as a possession.”* The speech concludes as it began with the majestic identification of God - *“I am the Lord.”* This is actually the fourth time this critical phrase occurs in God’s brief Word to Moses (cf. Exodus 6:2,6,7,8) Dr. Umberto Cassuto offers this assessment of the unique power and significance of this divine affirmation to Moses in the history of the Old Testament covenant:

*“Finally, like one who signs an authorization or accepts responsibility for something, the Lord repeats the formula with which He opened His*



address, **I am YHWH** and My Name shall be your assurance that My promises will be fulfilled. This reiteration forms another nexus between the conclusion of the divine communication and its beginning, as well as its middle verses. The entire declaration, by its elevated diction, by its triple (we may even say quadruple) iteration of the solemn formula **I am YHWH**, by its seven expressions of promise, which succeed one another like hammer blows, as well as by the threefold mention of the world **land** and of its being given to the Patriarchs or their descendants, leaves a profound impression worthy of the exalted nature of the theme.” (Cassuto, pp. 81-82)



*“Moses Spake So Unto the Children of Israel, But They Harkened Not”  
by J. James Tissot*

*“Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.”* - Moses did exactly as he had been commanded. He faithfully reported God’s message of comfort and encouragement to Israel, presumably through the tribal elders (cf. Exodus 3:16). But the Pharaoh’s intensification of the Israelites’ servitude - *“cruel bondage”* (cf. Exodus 5:4-21) - had



been most effective in dashing their hopes of deliverance and breaking their will to resist. *“Crushed by the cruel bondage to which they were subjected, and given the awesome power at the disposal of the Egyptian state, the people understandably regarded the utopian declarations as being utterly irrational.”* (Sarna, 2, p. 66) The text cites two reasons for their refusal to heed the words of Moses - ***“because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.”*** The phrase ***“their discouragement”*** literally reads *“from shortness of spirit* (Hebrew *“ruach”*)” in the original. The idiom can refer to profound depression or more literally to physical exhaustion (cf. Numbers 21:4; Judges 10:16; 16:16; Micah 2:7; Job 21:4). In this instance, the Hebrews’ problem may have been a debilitating combination of the two. They were physically and emotionally worn out unable to find either the courage or the energy to stand up to the King.

***“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country.’*** - The purpose of God is not altered by the apathy and unbelief of His people. The lack of support from the people combined with Moses’ utter lack of confidence in his own ability to accomplish the task combine to highlight the monergistic nature of the deliverance which will be achieved. This will be the work of God and of God alone!

***“But Moses said to the Lord, ‘If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?’*** - The prophet’s objections were flawlessly logical. Given the fact that he had failed to convince the Israelites of their impending deliverance, his mission to convince Pharaoh to release his slaves was most certainly doomed to failure. Surely the agents of Pharaoh throughout Goshen would by now have reported the dissension between the Jews and their would-be deliverer. That dissension could only serve to strengthen the King’s resolve to reject the demands of Moses and the God whom he purported to represent. At the same time, Moses argued, his abject failure with his own people only served to highlight his own weaknesses - ***“since I speak with faltering lips.”*** The colorful Hebrew idiom literally asserts - *“I speak with uncircumcised lips.”* The metaphorical reference is to an organ (so also hearts and ears - cf. Leviticus 26:41; Jeremiah 6:10; 9:25; Ezekiel 44:7,9) which is impeded and cannot operate properly - *“so to speak, obstructed by a foreskin that blocks its proper functioning.”* (Sarna, p. 32) The Lord, however, ignored His prophet’s objections as completely irrelevant to the accomplishment of the task which depended upon the power of God not the skills of His chosen instrument.



*“The Genealogy of Jesus” - 13<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illumination*

## ***The Genealogy of Moses and Aaron*** ***Exodus 6:13-27***

*Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, and He commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. These were the heads of their families: The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were Hanoch and Pallu, Herzon and Carmi. These were the clans of Reuben. The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite*





*“The Call of Moses” by Gerard Hoet*

*woman. These were the clans of Simeon. These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their records: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived 137 years. The sons of Gershon by clans were Libni and Shimei. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived 133 years. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi according to their records. Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived 137 years. The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg and Zicri. The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzapham and Sithri. Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nashan, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans. Eleazar, son of Aaron married one of the*

*daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phineas. These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan. It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, “Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.” These were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the same Moses and Aaron.*

*“Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites...”* - The flow of the narrative is, in the modern view, interrupted at this point by the insertion of the genealogy of Moses and Aaron. However, from a Biblical perspective which is more interested in substance than chronology, this is the most natural and logical point at which to further identify Moses and Aaron and explain the crucial role which they





*“Moses Before the Burning Bush”  
Bible Illustration by Harold Copping*

have been called upon by God to play in the deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage. Umberto Casutto explains:

*“This paragraph is regarded by many scholars as a foreign element in the narrative, which interrupts the sequence of events. But they overlooked the fact that contemporary European patterns of thought differ from those of antiquity...Here, after the dramatic tension of the narrative has subsided, and the representatives of the people of Israel before the Egyptian state have been recounted, it was desirable to devote a few lines to their genealogical status among their own people, so that the reader might know in detail who these men were and what place they occupied among the tribes of Israel.” (Casutto, p. 84)*

The genealogical segment opens with a broad restatement of the call of Moses and Aaron to serve as God’s spokesmen in the deliverance of His

people from bondage in Egypt - ***Now the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, and He commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.”***

The genealogy serves to link the Exodus narrative to the story of the patriarchs as it had been told in the Book of Genesis. The family history here follows the pattern established in Genesis 46:8-10. Although the primary focus of the genealogy is on the tribe of Levi from which Moses and Aaron are descended, the listing begins in the customary manner with the oldest sons, Reuben and Simeon. Furthermore, the text’s emphasis of the fact that the tribe of Levi was elevated to the distinction of the



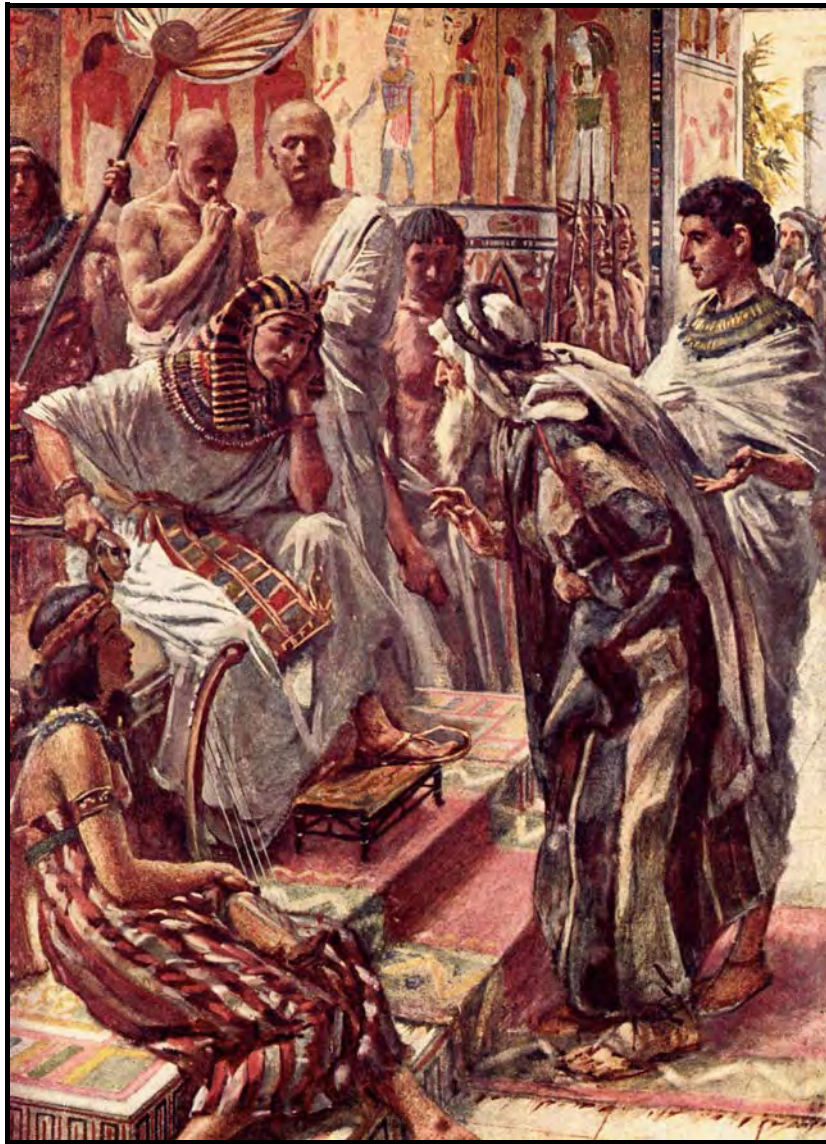
*“Jacob and His Sons on the Journey to Egypt”  
19th Century Bible Illustration by Robert Leinweber*

priesthood in preference to his older brothers also serves to stress the gracious nature of God’s selection in this matter. Levi was not chosen because of his position or status within his family. He was not chosen because of who he was but because of God’s undeserved love for him.

*“These were the heads of their families. The sons of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel were Hanoch and Pallu, Herzon and Carmi. These were the clans of Reuben.”* - The opening sentence forms the superscription for the entire family history which follows. The antecedent of the pronoun *“their”* in this sentence is Moses and Aaron who were the subjects of the preceding sentence. The brief undetailed description of the *“clans”* of Reuben and Simeon provides the context for the expanded presentation of the family of Levi which makes up the bulk of the genealogy. Each is quickly dismissed the formula *“these are the clans of...”* Four sons are listed as descendants of *“Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel.”* They are



***“Hanoch and Pallu, Herzon and Carmi.”*** Nothing is known of these men beyond their inclusion in the standard Biblical genealogies (cf. Genesis 46:9; Numbers 26:4; 1 Chronicles 5:3). ***“Hanoch”*** means *“dedicated.”* This was also the name of one of the clans of Midian, which may suggest that some of the descendants of Hanoch had intermarried with and settled among the Midianites. The Hebrew name ***“Pallu”*** means *“wondrous.”* ***“Herzon”*** is derived from a Hebrew verb which means *“to be green.”* Two cities in the territory of the tribe of Judah would later bear this name (cf. Joshua 15:3,25) ***“Carmi”*** (*“of the vineyard”*) is a name which also came to be associated with a Judahite clan (cf. Joshua 7:1,18).



***“Joseph Presenting His Father Jacob to Pharaoh”***  
***19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration by Harold Copping***



***“The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These were the clans of Simeon.”*** - Once again, virtually nothing is known of these individuals beyond their mention in the standard genealogies (cf. Genesis 46:10; Numbers 26:12; 1 Chronicles 4:24). The name ***“Jemuel”*** is noteworthy in that it contains the divine title ***“el.”*** The meaning of the prefix ***“jemu”*** is presently unknown. ***“Jamin”*** means ***“of the right hand.”*** ***“Ohad”*** is derived from a Hebrew word which means ***“to be strong.”*** This clan is not



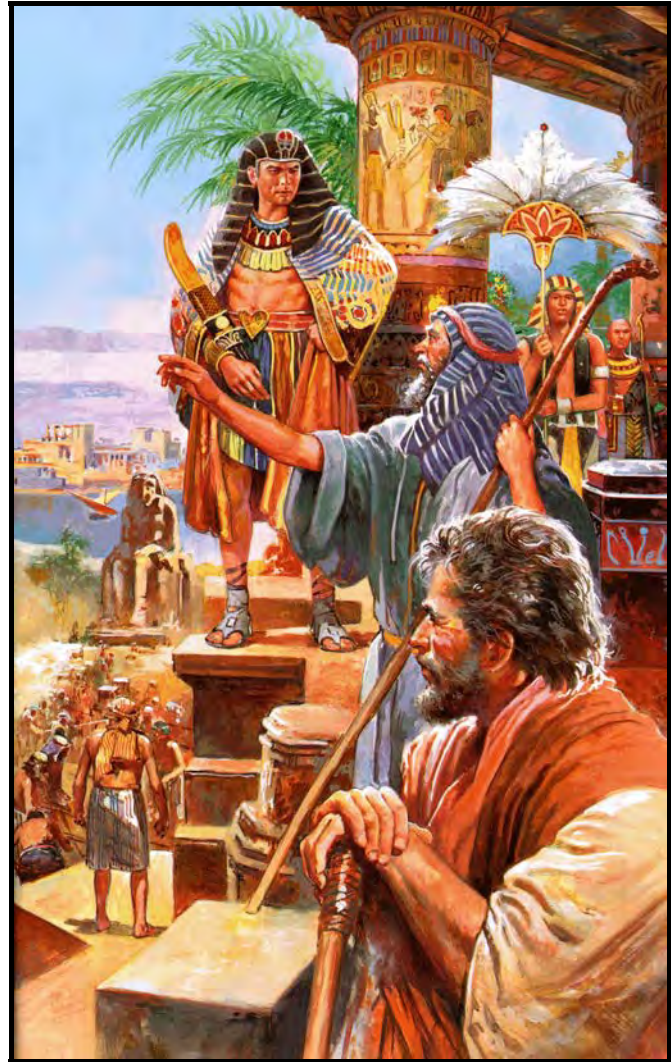
***“Saul, the King of Israel”***  
***Bible Illustration by Harold Copping***

mentioned in the other genealogies which has led the rabbis to conclude that the family died out either in Egypt or during the years of wandering in the wilderness. The Hebrew name ***“Jakin”*** means ***“he established.”*** ***“Zohar”*** is a common Biblical name (cf. Genesis 36:37-38; 1 Chronicles 4:7) which means ***“shining”*** or ***“brightness.”*** ***“Shaul,”*** a variation of ***“Saul”*** - the name of the first king of Israel, is derived from the verb ***“to borrow.”*** The fact that this son of Simeon chose to marry a woman of the Canaanites is specifically noted as an expression of the disfavor with which such intermarriage was viewed (cf. Genesis 24:3; 38:2; 46:10).

***“These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their records: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived 137 years.”*** - The more detailed account of the descendants of Levi begins in a manner similar to that of his two older brothers. The genealogies of Reuben and Simon had included only their sons. However, the listing of the house of Levi includes a total of four generations along with additional

information in reference to the direct lineage of Moses and Aaron. It is most probable that in typical Hebrew fashion this genealogy is not designed to include every generation, but only those individuals who were of particular importance in the history of the family of Levi. This view is supported by the extended duration of Israel's bondage in Egypt. Exodus 12:40-41 specifically designates the time span of Israel's captivity as 430 years: ***“Now the length of time that the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the Lord's divisions left Egypt.”***

This number is consistent with the more general figure of 400 years which God had previously revealed to Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:13) Numbers 3:1-4:49, a more detailed account of the family history of Levi, reports that there were 8,600 male descendants of the four sons of Kohath at the time of the Exodus. This would also seem to require more than only four generations between the patriarch Levi and the time of the Exodus. The genealogy of the tribe of Ephraim in 1 Chronicles 7:20-27 lists eleven generations for the same time period between Jacob's son Ephraim and his descendant Joshua. A minimum of ten generations during the captivity is further indicated by the fact that 600,000 Israelite men ***“besides women and children”*** took part in the Exodus (cf. Exodus 12:37).



***“Moses and Aaron's First Appearance Before Pharaoh” by Joseph Miralles***

The three sons of Levi here enumerated were the progenitors of the Levitical clans which would later be given the responsibility for priestly service in the tabernacle (cf. Numbers 3:17-39). The name ***“Gershon”*** means *“sojourner”* in reference to one who lives in exile or in a land not their own. A variation of the same name had been given



by Moses and Zipporah to their first son (cf. Exodus 2:22). **“Kohath,”** Levi’s second son, was named with a form of the Hebrew word for **“obedience”** while **“Merari”** is derived from an Egyptian word for **“love.”** The fact that **“Merari”** is an Egyptian name may suggest that the boy was born after Jacob’s arrival in the land of Egypt. The text goes on to inform us that **“Levi lived 137 years.”** No ages had been provided for Reuben and Simeon or their descendants. This additional information serves to further highlight the importance of the family of Levi. The extended life spans of these patriarchs was perceived as a mark of God’s blessing upon them.



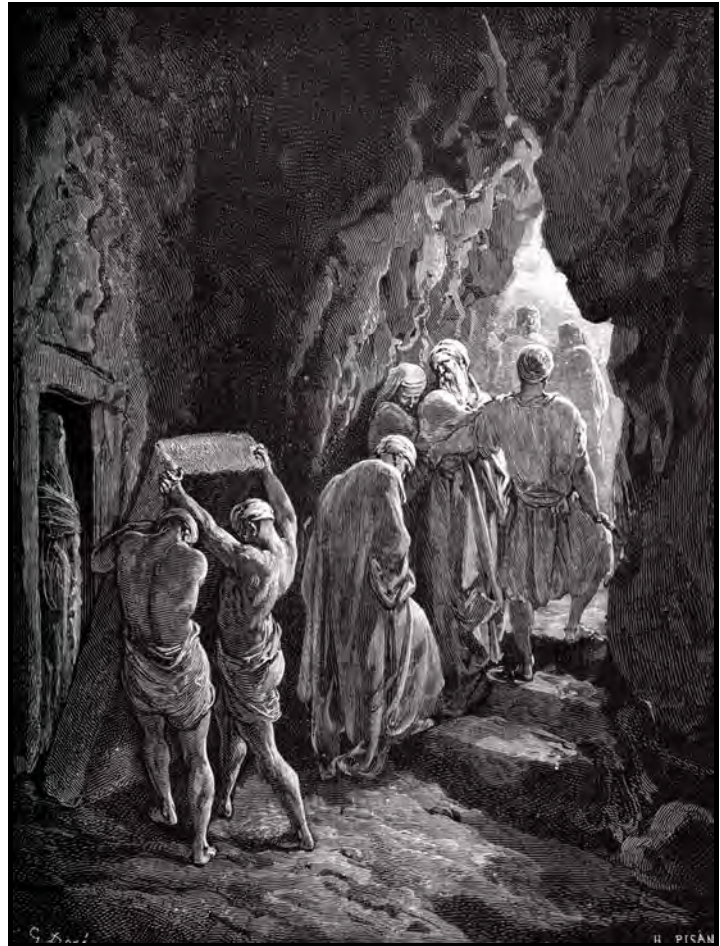
**“The Discovery of the Infant Moses”**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illustration by Harold Copping**

**“The sons of Gershon by clans, were Libni and Shimei. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath lived 133 years. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These were the clans of Levi according to their records.”** - Eight descendants of the sons of Levi are included in the third generation. Two sons are listed for **“Gershon.”** The descendants of **“Gershon”** would later be assigned responsibility for the screens and curtains of the Tabernacle and its courts (cf. Numbers 3:25-26) **“Libni”** means to be fair-skinned or pale. **“Shimei”** is a variation of the common Hebrew name Simeon. It is derived from the word **“obedient.”** Four sons are listed in the family of **“Kohath.”** The Kohathites were set apart to guard and care for the furnishings of the Tabernacle, including the sacred Ark of the Covenant (cf. Numbers 3:27-32) The Hebrew name **“Amram”** means **“the people are exalted.”** As previously

noted (cf. p. 189), it is most probable that this is a different individual than the **“Amram”** mentioned in subsequent verses who was father of Moses and Aaron a



number of generations later. Ernst Wendland correctly observes: *“The Amram listed as the son of Kohath must be an earlier Amram in the family genealogy since there were many more generations between Levi and Moses than just three. What we have here, as in other places in Scripture, is a summary listing of names.”* (Wendland, p. 43) **“Izhar”** expresses the pious desire that *“God reveal Himself as exalted.”* **“Hebron”** comes from the verb *“to unite”* or *“to join.”* **“Hebron”** would become the name of the major city of the tribe of Judah, in the days when Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Jebusites. The tribal elders of Judah were buried at Hebron within the cave of Machpelah where Abraham had purchased a grave for his beloved wife Sarah (Genesis 23:19). **“Uzziel”** also includes the name of God as it acknowledges that *“God is my strength.”* The importance of the family of **“Kohath”** as the clan from which Aaron and Moses would be born is indicated by that fact that here alone among the sons of Levi the patriarch’s age is cited. Like his father before him, **“Kohath”** lived to a ripe old age - **“Kohath lived 133 years.”**



*“The Burial of Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving by Gustav Dore*

**“The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi.”** - The descendants of **“Merari”** were the third of the Levitical clans. Their occupation in the maintenance of the Tabernacle was to oversee the structure itself, the frames, bars and pillars which made up the tent and its courtyards (cf. Numbers 3:33-37) Only two sons of **“Merari”** are included in the genealogy - **“Mahli”** (*“shrewd”* or *“cunning”*) and **“Mushi”** (based on the Hebrew verb *“to depart”*). This segment of the genealogy concludes with the summary observation - **“These were the clans of Levi according to their records.”** The original text literally reads *“These are the heads of the fathers’ houses according*



*“Jochebed Cradles Her Newborn Son”  
by S. Solomon Delt*

*to their families.”*

*“Amram married his father’s sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and Moses. Amram lived 137 years.”* - The text now specifically refers to the family of Aaron and Moses. The significance of this notation is indicated by the inclusion of not only *“Amram,”* the father, which was the customary practice, but also *“Jochebed,”* the mother of Aaron and Moses. The name *“Jochebed”* has elicited significant discussion because the name includes a form of *“Yahweh,”* the sacred Name of God. *“Jochebed”* means *“Yahweh is glorified.”* This would appear to indicate that at least some forms of the title *“Yahweh”* were known among the Hebrews prior to God’s revelation of Himself by that Name to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15).

The fact that *“Amram married his father’s sister”* has also resulted in considerable confusion. The marriage of a nephew to his aunt would later be prohibited as incestuous in the Torah (cf. Leviticus 18:12; 20:19). However, those legal requirements did not yet exist at this time and the reality is that relationships which would later be condemned as incestuous were not unusual during the age of the patriarchs. Abraham and Sarah were half brother and sister (Genesis 20:12). Such a marriage would have been contrary to Leviticus 18:9,11; 20:17; Deuteronomy 27:22; and Ezekiel 22:11. Jacob married two sisters (Leah and Rachel- Genesis 29). The marriage two siblings was later prohibited in Leviticus 18:18. The sordid story





*“The Flight of Lot and His Daughters from Sodom” by Robert Leinweber*

of Judah and his son Onan’s intercourse with Tamar (their daughter and sister-in-law respectively (Genesis 38) and the lurid tale of the seduction of Lot by his two daughters (Genesis 19:30-38) are indicative of the prevalence of such contact within the cultures of the patriarchal age. In the present context, the genealogical note that Amram married his father’s sister is provided to certify that Aaron and Moses were of pure Levitical descent on both sides of their family. The listing of **“Aaron and Moses,”** in that order, is somewhat unusual and is apparently intended to indicate their birth order within the family, Aaron being the older brother of Moses. Miriam, their sister, was the firstborn child of the family (cf. Numbers 26:59) The unique significance of this family is further indicated by the additional information that like Levi himself, **“Amram lived 137 years.”**

**“The sons of Izhar were Korah, Napheg and Zicri.”** - Having accomplished its primary purpose in establishing the Levitical pedigree of Aaron and Moses, the genealogy briefly returns to the other descendants of Kohath. The rabbis suggest that the sons of **“Izhar”** are included here primarily because of **“Korah”** who would later



be involved a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron and was destroyed by the Lord along with his followers (cf. Numbers 16). The Hebrew name **“Korah”** means *“baldness.”* In 2 Chronicles the descendants of **“Korah”** are singers in the Temple - **“Then some Levites from the Kohathites and the Korahites stood up and praised the Lord, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice.”** (2 Chronicles 20:19; cf. The Superscriptions of Psalms 42-49) **“Nepheg”** (*“leaping”*) and **“Zicri”** (*“remembrance”*) do not appear elsewhere in Scripture.

**“The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.”** The three descendants of **“Uzziel”** - **“Mishael”** (*“who is like God”*), **“Elzaphan”** (*“my God has treasured”*), and **“Sithri”** (*“secret one”*) are similarly obscure. They appear incidentally in connection with the burial of their cousins, **“Nadab”** and **“Abihu”** - the sons of Aaron who were killed by God because **“they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord contrary to His command.”**

(Numbers 10:1-4)



**“Aaron in the Vestments of the High Priest”**  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving

**“Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminidab and sister of Nahsan, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.”** - The focus of this genealogy on Aaron, the original high priest of Israel, is clearly demonstrated by the enumeration of the members of his family while none of the family of the far more prominent Moses are mentioned. The unique significance of the priestly family of Aaron is further suggested by the inclusion of his wife **“Elisheba”** (*“my God is perfection”*). **“Elisheba”** was a daughter of the tribe of Judah. Both her father **“Amminidab”** (*“my kinsman is generous”*) and her brother **“Nashon”** (*“foreteller”*) are both listed in the



*“The Destruction of Nadab and Abihu”  
18<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving by Gerard Hoet*

ancestry of King David (cf. Ruth 4:20-22; 1 Chronicles 2:10-12). The unusual addition of **“Nahsan”** may well be the result of his prominence as an ancestor of the great King. Four sons were born to Aaron and Elisheba - **“And she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.”** Both **“Nadab”** (“generous”) and **“Abihu”** (“God is my Father”) were killed, as previously noted, because of their departure from divinely ordained worship - **“They offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to His command.”** (Numbers 10:4) **“Eleazar,”** whose name means **“God has helped,”** became his father’s successor through whom the office of the high priest was continued. **“Ithamar”** (“God has appeared”) and his descendants remained active in the temple priesthood through the time of King David and beyond. 1 Chronicles 24 notes:

*“A larger number of leaders were found among Eleazar’s descendants than among Ithamar’s and they were divided accordingly; sixteen heads of families from Eleazar’s descendants and eight heads of families from Ithamar’s descendants. They divided them impartially by drawing lots, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of God among the descendants of both Eleazar and Ithamar.”* (1 Chronicles 24:4-5)

*“The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite clans.”* - The rabbis suggest that the descendants of **“Korah”** were specifically included in the genealogy to emphasize that the sons of **“Korah”** did not die with their

father at the time of his rebellion against Moses and Aaron. Numbers 26:10-11 points out:

***“The same Dathan and Abiram were the community officials who rebelled against Moses and Aaron and were among Korah’s followers when they rebelled against the Lord. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served as a warning sign. The line of Korah, however, did not die out.”***

Nahum Sarna summarizes the role of the descendants of Korah in the worship of the temple in this way: *“The Korahite clan later became a guild of temple singers to whom several psalms are attributed. They are also listed as having been ‘guards of the threshold of the tabernacle’ and as performing other tasks, such as baking and gate keeping.”* (Sarna, p. 35) The name **“Assir”** means *“the captive”* which suggests that this clan may have originated from a wife who had been a prisoner of war. Both **“Elkanah”** (*“God has acquired”*) and **“Abiasaph”** (*“God has added a child”*) indicate the linguistic influence of Hebrew and Egyptian.

***“Eleazar, son of Aaron, married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phineas.”*** - The genealogy concludes with a final reference to ***“Eleazar, the son of Aaron”*** thereby highlighting once

again the succession of the high priestly line. The unnamed wife of **“Eleazar”** is simply identified as ***“one of the daughters of Putiel.”*** **“Putiel”** means *“the one whom*



***“The Death of Korah” - 19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving***





*“Moses Ordains Eleazar as Aaron’s Successor”  
19<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Engraving*

*God has given.”* No further information about **“Putiel”** is provided which suggests that this figure was sufficiently well known to render identification unnecessary. Only one of the sons of **“Eleazar”** is mentioned, the famous hero **“Phineas.”** The name itself means *“the Nubian”* or *“the dark skinned one.”* This may literally be an indication that this grandson of Aaron was the result of intermarriage with a woman of Ethiopian descent or could simply refer to an unusually dark complexion. In a time of idolatry and immorality, **“Phineas”** had distinguished himself as a fearless defender of God and His truth. While Israel was encamped at Shittim they were seduced into the sexual rites which were the essence of the worship of the fertility God Baal. The sad story is told in Numbers 25. Rabbinic tradition informs us that **“the Israelite man”** (Numbers 25:6) who brazenly brought his heathen consort into the camp before the tabernacle was a prince of the tribe of Simeon named *“Zimri.”* The woman was *“Cozbi,”* the daughter of *“Balak,”* the King of Moab, and a priestess of Baal’s female counterpart Asherah. (Ginzberg, 3, p. 384) While the two



*“Phineas Slays Zimri and Cozbi”  
13<sup>th</sup> Century Bible Illumination*

were engaged in intercourse in Zimri’s tent, Phineas burst in and drove his spear through both of their bodies. It is said that Phineas hoisted their impaled bodies on his spear and hurled them to the ground before the Tabernacle. According to Hebrew legend, God performed twelve miracles to facilitate the bold actions of Phineas. In his classic six volume study *“The Legends of the Jews,”* Louis Ginzburg reports the traditional view:

*“God performed no less than twelve miracles for Phineas, which not only made it impossible for the sinners to attack him, but also showed the people that his action found favor in the sight of the Lord. The first miracle was that an angel would not allow the sinful couple to separate when Phineas surprised them; the second miracle was that the angel stopped their mouths so that they could not cry out for help; the third miracle was that Phineas’s lance drove through both the man and the woman’s genitals; the fourth miracle was that the upper, that is, iron part of the lance extended, so that Phineas could at one thrust pierce the*

*man was well as the woman; the fifth miracle was that Phineas's arm to lift both upon the point of his lance; the sixth miracle was that the wooden shaft of the lance sustained the weight of two persons; the seventh miracle was that the two bodies remained poised upon the lance and did not fall off; the eighth miracle was that the angel turned the shameless pair around, so that all might see that Phineas had surprised them 'in flagranti;' the ninth miracle was that no blood flowed from*



*“Phineas Slays Zimri” - Luther Bible Woodcut by Johann Teufel , 1572*

*them although they had been thrust through, or else Phineas would have been polluted; the tenth miracle was that the shameless couple did not give up the ghost so long as Phineas bore them upon the point of his lance, as he would otherwise have been polluted by their corpses; the eleventh miracle was that the angel raised the doorposts of the room so that Phineas might pass through with the sinners upon the point of his lance; and the twelfth miracle was that when the tribe of Simeon prepared to avenge Prince Zimri's death upon Phineas, the angel sent a plague upon them so that they were impotent against him.” (Ginzburg, 3, p. 387-388)*



While the Biblical text does not report any of these colorful embellishments, it does tell us that God commended the brave priest for his action and promised an ongoing role for his descendants in the priesthood of Israel:

*“Phineas, son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned My anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for My honor among them, so that in My zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore, tell him that I am making My covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.”* (Numbers 25:10-13)



*“The Death of Zimri and Cozbi”  
Luther Bible Woodcut by Wolf Kopfl - 1532*

The placement of Phineas at the culmination of the genealogy puts the family of Aaron in the best possible light and strengthens the legitimacy of the Levitical priesthood which God would establish through them.

*“These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan. It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said, ‘Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.’ They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the same Moses and Aaron.”* - The basic purpose of this brief genealogy was, in the words of commentator John Durham, *“the celebration of the descendency of the promise.”*