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OJPS ²And God spoke unto Moses, and said unto him: "I am the LORD; ³and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name

RASHI **2 God spoke to Moses and said to him.** He called him to account for his harsh question, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22). [A] The Sages have explained: When Moses asked God, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22) the Holy One said to him: What a pity that the Patriarchs are no more! How I mourn their deaths! I appeared to them many times as El Shaddai, and they never asked Me, "What is Your name?" But you

said to Me, "When they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (3:13). When Abraham wanted to bury Sarah, he could not even find a grave for her without paying cold cash for it (Genesis 23). Isaac faced contention over the wells that he dug (Gen. 26:18–20). Jacob, too, had to buy a piece of land to pitch his tent (Gen. 33:19). And not one of them questioned My behavior! Yet here you are saying, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22). — But this midrash is not consistent with the biblical text, for a number of reasons. First, the text does not say, "They *did not ask* My name LORD." Second, He did indeed reveal that Name to Abram, at the covenant between the pieces: "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession" (Gen. 15:7). Third, in what way would it make sense to follow such a complaint by saying "I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites" (v. 5)? So I say the text is most coherent when interpreted in a way that works in context, "a word fitly spoken" (Prov. 25:11). Let the midrash be told anyway, as it says, "Behold, My word is like fire—declares the LORD—and like a hammer that shatters rock!" (Jer. 23:29)—interpreting a verse is like a hammer striking rock: it creates many sparks. **And said to him, I am the LORD.** I faithfully reward those who follow Me. I did not send you for nothing, but to fulfill My promise to the Patriarchs. — We find in a number of places that the expression "I am the LORD" indicates that God can be relied on, whether to punish (e.g., Lev. 19:12) or to reward (e.g., Lev. 22:31). I have heard something similar from R. Baruch b. Eliezer [B], who brought me a proof from the following verse: "Assuredly, I will teach them, once and for all I will teach them My power and My might. And they shall learn that My name is LORD" (Jer. 16:21). We learn from this that even when the Holy One fulfills words of retribution, He makes known that His name is LORD—how much the more so when He is fulfilling a promise of reward.

3 I appeared to the Patriarchs as El Shaddai. I made a promise to each of them, and

[A] Rashi is explaining why the text is "God spoke and said," not just "God said." [B] He is otherwise unknown.

NAHMANIDES **6:3 But I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.**

See Rashi's comment. What he meant by it is that the fulfillment of the promise had not yet been made known. For the *time* of fulfillment of the promise had not yet arrived in any case. But his explanation would require changing the verb so that the verse would read either "I did not make known to them My name YHWH" or "My name YHWH was not known to them." Perhaps he understood the phrase to mean (following the Hebrew word order reflected in OJPS), "My name is YHWH, *but* I did not make Myself known to them"

by that name. The English translations follow Ibn Ezra. What the text really means is that God appeared to the Patriarchs as El Shaddai, the name by which He can overcome astrological forces and perform miracles that are great but do not upset the natural order of things. "In famine He redeemed them from death, in war, from the sword" (Job 5:20). He gave them wealth, honor, and every good thing. They were like all the assurances in the Torah with regard to blessings and curses. For reward for observing the commandments and punishment for transgressions both come through miraculous means. For if man was left to his nature, or to his astrological fate, his deeds would neither help nor hurt him. But in this world, reward and punishment for everything commanded in the Torah is miraculous but hidden. A neutral observer would see them as natural events, when in truth they are the man's reward or punishment. That is why the Torah goes on at length about the promises that apply to this world, but does not explain the spiritual promises that apply to the world of souls. For the promises that apply to this world are in fact supernatural, but the survival of the soul and its cleaving to God are natural, since by rights it

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6:2 God spoke.** This expression appears only two other places in the entire Bible: "God spoke to Noah" (Gen. 8:15) and, at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, "God spoke all these words" (20:1) (Masorah). **I am the LORD.** I told you that you would be "God" to Pharaoh, but don't misunderstand: I am the real God (Hizkuni). And as such I not only created the world, but keep it in existence (Sforno).

3 Shaddai. Saadia is correct that the name means "the one [who said] 'Enough' [to the world]." The use of the relative pronoun *sha-* is comparable to that of *asher* in Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh (3:14). The name may refer to God's telling the heavens at the beginning of creation that they had spread far enough and/or to His own existence being sufficient (Abarbanel). **My name יהוה.** "I appeared ... as El Shaddai,

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה: ³וַיֵּרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why does God introduce Himself to Moses (v. 2) again? ♦ Why does He both "speak" and "say"? ♦ If this "God" was indeed the angel of 3:2, how can he say, "I am the LORD"? ♦ How can God say (v. 3) that the Patriarchs did not know Him as LORD, when Gen. 15:7 and many other verses testify that He spoke with them many times under that Name?

RASHBAM **2 God spoke to Moses.** In Egypt. [A] **I am the LORD.** And the definition of My name is that I have the power to keep My promise.

3 As El Shaddai. The revelation of this name was a promise for the future, which I have not yet kept. **By My name יהוה.** NJPS has moved this from its original place in the verse, and both English translations have added "by," which is not in the Hebrew. It

[A] Probably this means that Moses did not have to leave the realm of idolatry in order to communicate with God; contrast Rashi's comment to 9:29.

IBN EZRA **2 God spoke to Moses.**

The angel spoke to him, as agent of the LORD. **I am the LORD.** I have sent you to make known My honored name. For **I did not make Myself known** to the Patriarchs by it, as they deserved. — Everyone acknowledged God (even Pharaoh, as I shall explain in my comments to 8:15), but not all even of the Israelites knew that the LORD was God. Thus God tells Moses "I am the LORD" to prepare him to tell the Israelites this in v. 6.

3 I appeared. In visions of the night. **Shaddai.** This is a difficult word to explain. R. Saadia understands it to mean *sha-dai* ("that [said] 'enough' [to the world]"). But I do not see how "that enough" can be a name. Rather, "Shaddai" must be an adjective; it has the same vowel pattern as *davvai* ("sick") in Jer. 8:18. Samuel ha-Nagid derives it from שָׁדַד, "to destroy," taking it to mean "strong and victorious," and this explains it well. **But I did not make Myself known ... by My name יהוה.** Ibn Janah, following the Hebrew word order (see OJPS), interprets it as an oath: "By My name YHWH! I did not make Myself known to them as I have to you." The word "but," however, cannot be interpreted as introducing

NJPS them by My name יהוה. ⁴I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which

OJPS YHWH I made Me not known to them. ⁴And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of

RASHI each time I told them, “I am El Shaddai.” [C] **But I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.** It does not say, “I did not make this name known to them,” but “I did not make Myself known to them” by that Name. That is, I did not make Myself known to them in My aspect of utter truthfulness and reliability, which is represented by the Tetragrammaton. For I made them these promises but did not fulfill them.

וְאֵל־יִשְׁכָּב בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי וְשְׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא
נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם: 4 וְגַם הַקְּמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ How are the establishing of the covenant (v. 4) and hearing the moaning of the Israelites (v. 5) connected with God's Name?

4 I also established My covenant with them. Even though I appeared to them as

[C] See Rashi's comment to v. 4.

NAHMANIDES should “return to God Who bestowed it” (Eccles. 12:7). I will say more about this later, with God's help.

God, then, told Moses: I showed Myself to the Patriarchs in the power by which I manipulate the constellations and help my chosen ones. But by My name YHWH—the name by which all that exists has its being—I did not make Myself known to them. That is, I did not alter nature and create new things for them. “Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD” (v. 6). Inform them once more of the great Name, for by it I will work wonders for them. Let them know that “I the LORD do all these things” (Isa. 45:7). And everything that Ibn Ezra said on this topic is correct. But he is like one who prophesies without realizing what he is saying. For he has not explained the change from “appeared” to “make known.” He could explain this as follows: God specifically says **I appeared** to the Patriarchs because their prophecy was all received in night visions. But that of Moses was received face to face. So **I did not make Myself known to them** as I have to you.

The True meaning of this text is what it literally says in context: I appeared to them through the lens of El Shaddai, following what God says in Num. 12:6, “When a prophet of the LORD arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream.” But I did not make Myself known to them, for they did not look through the clear glass to be able to know Me like Moses, the one “whom the LORD singled out, face to face” (Deut. 34:10). The Patriarchs knew YHWH, but not through prophecy. So when Abraham spoke with God, he would use the word “Lord” (e.g., Gen. 18:32) or the combination “Lord GOD” (e.g., Gen. 15:2), [A] not the Tetragrammaton alone.

What it means is that the Shekhinah was revealed to the Patriarchs, and there was divine speech with them through a weakened form of God's attribute of justice, and that is how He dealt with them. But He dealt with Moses, and was known to him, through His attribute of mercy, which is indicated by His great Name, the Tetragrammaton—as Isaiah says, “Who made His glorious arm march at the right hand of Moses ... Thus did You shepherd Your people to win for Yourself a glorious name” (Isa. 63:12,14). Therefore Moses does not use the name El Shaddai in the Torah from this point on, for the Torah was given through His great Name—“I the LORD am your God” (20:2). [B] “From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire” (Deut. 4:36). I have already hinted at the meaning of “the heavens.” [C] May the Holy One open our eyes and show us wonders from His Torah.

[A] That is, the word “Lord” followed by the Tetragrammaton. [B] This is the beginning of the Ten Commandments, the moment at which the Torah was considered to be given to Israel. [C] See his comment to Gen. 1:8.

grammaton? There is no doubt that the Patriarchs knew this name. They merely did not know that this name, like Shaddai, was descriptive as well as being a name. And now I will reveal to you something of the mystery of “El Shaddai.” We know that there is an intermediary world between the upper world of the Lord and our lower world. Because the natural place of the human soul is above the intermediary world, if it is wise enough to abandon the pleasures of the lower world and cleave to God, God can extricate it from the fate determined for it astrologically in the intermediary world of the stars. Thus God tells Abram, “I am El Shaddai.... I will make you exceedingly numerous” (Gen. 17:1–2), overcoming the childlessness that had been determined for him astrologically. “The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm” (Gen. 48:16) of whom Jacob spoke played a similar role. As I shall explain in my comments to 20:1 and 33:23, cleaving to God in order to overcome one's predetermined fate is the mystery underlying the entire Torah. The Patriarchs did not achieve this cleaving to God to the same degree as did Moses, who knew God face to face. This is what enabled Moses to alter the course of nature and perform miracles, which the Patriarchs could not do. In context, “I am the LORD” is the answer to Moses' question of 5:22, “Why did You send me?”—“I sent you to make this name known throughout the world, just as I sent the Patriarchs to make known My name El Shaddai.”

4 I also established My covenant. I have also sent you because I swore **to give them**—or to their offspring, who are considered like them—the land of Canaan.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and My name YHWH.” Note that the cantillation marks suggest a separation between this phrase and the following phrase, **I did not make Myself known to them** (Bekhor Shor). To them—to Israel. God's name is His self, and His self is His name (Gersonides). But I must make it known to the Israelites before they can become My people (Sforno).

RASHBAM must rather be interpreted “but My name is YHWH.” [B] That is, I appeared to them as El Shaddai, but the essence of My name is YHWH. **I did not make Myself known to them.** This is a repetition of the previous statement: I did not reveal Myself to them as the essence of My name, but only as El Shaddai. But to you I have revealed the essence of My name—Ehyeh—and My appellation—YHWH. [C] And in your time I will fulfill My promise “to give them the land of Canaan” (v. 4). To repeat: the verse does not say (as it might have), “My name YHWH I did not make known to them.” What it says is this: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but My name is YHWH. I did not make My self known to them.”

[B] These are the English letters corresponding to the four Hebrew letters of the Tetragrammaton, God's personal name, as printed in the translations. [C] See his comment to 3:15.

IBN EZRA an oath in Hebrew, as it does in Arabic. Grammatically, the “as” of “as El Shaddai” applies to “My name YHWH” as well (see the translations, where it is translated as “by” the second time). Saadia explains it to mean that the Patriarchs knew God as El Shaddai, and not *only* as YHWH. But there is no need for this nicety, since we know that YHWH and El Shaddai are one and the same, and there is no distinction between them, except that Shaddai is always descriptive and YHWH is sometimes descriptive and sometimes a proper noun, as I have pointed out in my note to 3:15. After all, God explicitly tells Abram, “I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans” (Gen. 15:7), and tells Jacob, “I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac” (Gen. 28:13). Jeshua b. Judah thinks that the Patriarchs did not know the Tetragrammaton, which was put into their stories by Moses when he wrote the Torah. But this is incorrect. How could Moses do this and subsequently write that the Patriarchs did not know the Tetra-

NJPS they lived as sojourners. ⁵I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. ⁷And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the

RASHI El Shaddai, I also made a covenant between Myself and them to give them the land of Canaan. To Abraham, in the passage that establishes the covenant of circumcision: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless.... I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God'" (Gen. 17:1,8). To Isaac: "Reside in this land,

and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham" (Gen. 26:3). [D] And the same oath I swore to Abraham as El Shaddai, I swore to Jacob: "I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase; a nation, yea an assembly of nations, shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins. The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac I assign to you; and to your offspring to come will I assign the land" (Gen. 35:11-12). So you see, I made a vow to them that I have not yet fulfilled.

5 I have now—being obligated to fulfill the covenant I established—**heard the moaning of the Israelites** who are moaning **because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered** that same covenant. For at the covenant between the pieces I told Abram, "I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve" (Gen. 15:14).

6 Say, therefore, in accordance with that oath, **to the Israelite people: I am the LORD.** Use the Name that indicates that my promise is reliable. **I will free you.** For that is what I promised: "In the end they shall go free with great wealth" (Gen. 15:14). **The labors of the Egyptians.** Literally, from "under" the labors of the Egyptians—that is, their burdens, both literally and figuratively.

[D] God does not use the name El Shaddai here, but we can deduce that Isaac knew it in connection with the promise of the land from what he said to Jacob, "May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly of peoples. May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham" (Gen. 28:3). This and the two verses in Rashi's comment are the only three places where "Shaddai" appears before the story of Joseph.

NAHMANIDES 4-5 I also established My covenant with them. That is, I appeared to them as El Shaddai and also established for them this covenant with Me. And I have now, as YHWH, heard the moaning of the Israelites ... and I have remembered My covenant that I established with them. A word to the wise is sufficient. [D] Now with regard to the midrash quoted by Rashi (in his comment to v. 2) about the Patriarchs never questioning His behavior or asking Him for His name: In fact, this midrash is quite consistent with the biblical text. The difficulty that prompted the Sages to create this midrash is the idea that the text would introduce a comment about the prophetic level of the Patriarchs only to belittle them and to say that God appeared to them "only" as El Shaddai. What would be the point of this? This text could just as well have begun with v. 6. So the Sages interpret vv. 2-5 as reproof to Moses, to tell him, "The Patriarchs, whose level of prophecy did not approach yours, and who knew Me only as El Shaddai, believed Me. I established My covenant with them, and I heard the moaning of their children on their account. But you, who know Me by My great Name, by which I made My promise to you, how much the more should you rely on My mercy, and promise the Israelites in My name that I will work signs and wonders with them." This too is reasonable and correct.

6 I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians. He promises them that He will bring them out of the Egyptians' land so that they need no longer bear their heavy burdens. **Deliver you from their bondage.** They will be completely out from under the Egyptians' control, not owing them any tribute. **I will redeem you.** He will perform extraordinary chastisements on the Egyptians until they say, "Go, Israel, as a ransom for our lives!" For "redemption" implies a monetary transaction. **With an outstretched arm.** His arm will be stretched out over them until He brings them out.

7 I will take you to be My people. When you come to Mount Sinai and accept the Torah, "you shall be My treasured possession" (19:5). [D] Nahmanides is hinting at a kabbalistic interpretation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 5 I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites. Even before My name was known to them. Even then I tried to extend My providence to them and fulfill My covenant with them. How much the more are they worthy of My providence now that My name is known to them! (Gersonides).

6 Say, therefore. For these three reasons: because I wish to take them for My people, because I made a covenant with their ancestors, and because I have heard their moaning (Sforno). **I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians.** From the day the plagues begin, your servitude will be lightened (Sforno). **Extraordinary chastisements.** Pharaoh would have let them go immediately had I wished him to: "Like channeled water is the mind of the king in the LORD's hand; He directs it to whatever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). But I wish to revenge Myself on him for enslaving them (Bekhor Shor).

7 I will take you to be My people. Better that you be slaves to Me than to Pharaoh (Bekhor Shor). **I, the LORD, am your God who**

אתם לתת להם את-ארץ כנען את ארץ מגריהם אשר-גרו בה: ⁵ וגם אני שמעתי את-נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם ואנפך את-בריתי: ⁶ לכן אמר לבני-ישראל אני יהוה והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים והצלתני אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים: ⁷ ולקחתני אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלהים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why the triple description—"free," "deliver," and "redeem"—of the same thing (v. 6)? ♦ How does what was said previously lead "therefore" to this redemption?

OJPS Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned. ⁵And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Wherefore say unto the children of Israel: I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; ⁷and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God,

IBN EZRA 5 I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites. Indicating that they have repented; this is still another reason why I have sent you.

6 Therefore. Just as I remain in existence, so does My word. **An outstretched arm.** Outstretched from heaven to earth.

7 I will take you to be My people. When you accept the Torah at Mount Sinai. **Your God who freed you.** Though their

NJPS LORD, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the LORD.” ⁹But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹“Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land.” ¹²But Moses appealed to the LORD, saying,

RASHI **8 I swore.** With OJPS, “I lifted up My hand”—to swear by My throne.

9 They would not listen to Moses. They took no consolation from what he said. [E] **Their spirits crushed.** One’s spirit is one’s “wind.” One who is in distress is short of breath, and can hardly draw his lungs full of air.

12 How then should Pharaoh heed me? This one of the 10 biblical examples of

[E] “They would not listen” often means “they would not obey”; but here Moses was not asking them to do anything, merely trying to reassure them.

NAHMANIDES **You shall know that I, the LORD, am your God who freed you**

from the labors of the Egyptians. According to Ibn Ezra, the conjunction of Israel’s stars decreed that they should remain in exile. But that is not the intent of this section, which merely says: When I redeem you with an outstretched arm that all the nations see, you will know that I am the Lord who creates new wonders in the world, and I am your God and have done all this for you, for you are “the LORD’s portion” (Deut. 32:9).

8 I swore. Rashi takes the literal “I lifted up My hand” to indicate that God is putting His hand on His throne; Ibn Ezra, citing Deut. 32:40 and Dan. 12:7, takes it as metaphoric. But the True meaning is, “I have lifted up My hand of power to Myself that I will give you the land.” [E] But the Daniel verse cited by Ibn Ezra has nothing to do with this topic; it refers not to God but to the angel “clothed in linen,” who swears by “the Ever-Living One.”

9 Their spirits crushed. Not that they did not *believe* in God or his prophet, but that they would not *listen* because their spirits were crushed, like that of a man so crushed by his toil that he does not want to live an extra minute in pain, even though he knows that he will eventually get some relief. What crushed their spirits was the fear that Pharaoh would kill them, as the foremen told Moses (5:21). **Cruel bondage.** This refers to the pressure the taskmasters were putting on them (5:13), not giving them a moment to think.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying. The commentators have said that throughout the Torah this word “saying”—literally, “to say”—always indicates something that is *to be said* to the Israelites. But here it is something to be said to Pharaoh. In Gen. 31:29, it introduces something that is not to be said at all! Moreover, in many places the speech to Israel is made explicit anyway (e.g., 7:8–9, Lev. 18:1–2, Num. 15:37–38, Deut. 1:9). In 7:9, “When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, ‘Show a wonder for you,’” it cannot mean “saying to someone else.” In my opinion the word is always used to indicate a full, clear, complete expression—not a doubtful or allusive one. This explains why it is so common in the Torah, for God spoke with Moses “mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles” (Num. 12:8). [F]

12 The Israelites would not listen to me. Because you did not make my words ones they could listen to. **How then should**

[E] Nahmanides adds here an interpretation of Deut. 32:40 whose meaning is unclear. [F] Nahmanides understands “saying” as a form of the infinitive absolute, used in Biblical Hebrew to add emphasis to a verb. (Though this form ordinarily precedes the other verb, he points out that it can sometimes come afterward, as in Jer. 23:17.) Modern scholars understand “saying” as indicating the beginning of a direct quotation, the equivalent of our quotation marks.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **freed you.** And you will serve me willingly, saying, “Better to serve the Great King than a commoner like that Pharaoh!” (Bekhor Shor).

9 Moses told this to the Israelites. Without Aaron’s help, as commanded in v. 6 (Gersonides). **They would not listen to Moses.** For which reason the promise of v. 8, “I will bring you into the land,” was fulfilled not for them, but for their children (Sforno). **Their spirits crushed.** Rather, with Ps. 78:8, their “spirit was not true to God” because the **cruel bondage** prevented them from thinking about what Moses had said (Sforno).

11 Go and tell Pharaoh. Without Aaron’s help—prompting Moses’ appeal in v. 12 (Gersonides).

12 The Israelites would not listen to me. Moses did not realize that they did not listen because their spirits had been crushed (Hizkuni).

OJPS who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for a heritage: I am the LORD.” ⁹And

Moses spoke so unto the children of Israel; but they hearkened not unto Moses for impatience of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

¹⁰And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ¹¹“Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.” ¹²And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying: “Behold, the

RASHBAM **9 They would not listen to Moses.** They would not listen to him now, even though earlier “the people were convinced” (4:31). For they had expected to get some rest from their hard labor, but now the work was harder than ever.

IBN EZRA astrological fate at that point was to remain in exile, as I shall explain in my comments to 33:21.

8 I swore. NJPS understands the more literal “I lifted up My hand” (OJPS) correctly as a metaphor; see “Lo, I raise My hand to heaven” (Deut. 32:40) and “He lifted his right hand and his left hand to heaven” (Dan. 12:7). **I will bring you into the land.** That is, you or your children. [A] Some say it was a conditional promise, but this is unnecessary. For many of those who left Egypt were under 20 years old and *did* enter the land, along with the children of those who died in the wilderness. For only those 20 or older were condemned to die in the wilderness.

9 They would not listen. It is not that they would not believe him, but that they literally would not listen, **their spirits crushed** by the length of the exile and by the increasingly **cruel bondage** that had been imposed on them.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying. To him. [B]

11 Go. To the palace.

12 The Israelites, who are Your people, would not listen to me; how then should

[A] Eventually, this generation of Israelites died in the wilderness; it was the next generation that was brought into the land of Canaan. [B] See Nahmanides’ comment.

NJPS “The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Pharaoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!” ¹³So the LORD spoke to both Moses and Aaron in regard to the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, instructing them to deliver the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

¹⁴The following are the heads of their respective clans.

The sons of Reuben, Israel’s first-born:
Enoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi;

RASHI the inference *a fortiori*. [F] **Impeded speech.** Literally, with OJPS, “uncircumcised lips.” That is, “obstructed lips,” for I say that “uncircumcised” always means “obstructed.” Thus in Jer. 6:10, “their ears are blocked” is literally “their ears are uncircumcised”; in Jer. 9:25, “uncircumcised of heart” means “blocked from understanding,” just as with the uncircumcised male member, where the foreskin blocks and covers it.

13 The LORD spoke to both Moses and Aaron. Since Moses had described himself as being “a man of impeded speech” (v. 12), God assigned Aaron to him as his spokesman. **In regard to the Israelites,** they were instructed to lead them sensitively and to put up with them, **and in regard to Pharaoh king of Egypt,** they were instructed to speak respectfully to him. So the midrash has it. But contextually it is as the translations have it. As far as the contents of the instruction, they are to be found in ch. 7, after the material inserted to give the lineage of Moses and Aaron.

14 The following are the heads of their respective clans. Needing to give the genealogy of Levi for the sake of Moses and Aaron, the text begins by showing how they

[F] The inference *a fortiori* (in Hebrew, *kal va-homer*) is used in rabbinic literature to present a case and then argue that a second case is just like it, in some respect, but even more so. Here, if the Israelites, a sympathetic audience, would not listen to Moses, then Pharaoh, a hostile audience, certainly would not. Rashi’s comment is taken from Genesis Rabbah, which lists the other examples as Gen. 44:8, Num. 12:14, Deut. 31:27, 1 Sam. 23:3, Jer. 12:5 (two cases), Ezek. 15:5, Prov. 11:31, and Esther 9:12. But see Abarbanel’s question about this verse.

NAHMANIDES **Pharaoh heed me?** Moreover, I am a man of impeded speech and not fit to speak before a great king. This could be interpreted to mean that Moses thought the Israelites would not listen to him because of his deficiency, because he was a man of impeded speech and could not formulate consoling words to speak to their hearts. How then could he speak to Pharaoh? The reason for Moses’ insistence is that originally (3:18) God did not instruct him to speak to Pharaoh, merely to go to Pharaoh with the elders, and that they would all speak to Pharaoh. Moses must have assumed that the elders would speak, and he could remain silent. His complaint that he was not “a man of words” (4:10) was because he was embarrassed even to speak to the people. God assured him that Aaron would do his talking to the people, which is indeed what happened at first (4:30). But here in v. 6 Moses himself is commanded to speak to the people—but they would not listen to him. Now, being commanded to speak to Pharaoh as well, he repeats that he is “a man of impeded speech.” “So the LORD spoke to both Moses and Aaron in regard to the Israelites”—to tell them all He would command—“and Pharaoh”—to let them go (v. 13). Rashi and NJPS do not make this clear.

13 In regard to the Israelites. Rashi points out that the contents of the instruction are found in ch. 7, after the genealogy, like someone saying, “But now let us return to our previous subject.” Ibn Ezra is of the same opinion. But I do not share this opinion. Once Moses had spoken to the Israelites per God’s command (v. 6) and they had not listened to him, God commanded both him and Aaron to speak to both the people and to Pharaoh. Moses assumed that both of them would be present on every occasion, for every speech and every marvel, and that only one of them would have to talk. This is how it works when there is a two-man delegation. One speaks and the other remains silent. Moses was willing to go along with this. Now God tells Moses a second time, “I am the LORD” (v. 29) who appeared to you alone, commanding you to speak in My great Name, “Speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you.” For all My utterances will come to you, not to Aaron with you. It is you whom I have made My messenger to Pharaoh. At this point Moses objects again that he is a man of “impeded speech” (v. 30), and God tells him, “I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet” (7:1). You will go before Pharaoh and command Aaron, but Pharaoh will not hear your words. Aaron, on assignment from you, will utter your words, just as God commands a prophet and the prophet utters His words and reproves the people with them. — This was a promotion for Moses, which he earned by his great humility in being embarrassed to speak because of his impeded speech. Note that eventually “Moses himself was much esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh’s courtiers and among the people” (11:3). Measure for measure—he had been afraid that they would despise him. And see my comment to 7:2.

14 The sons of Reuben. The text did not want to begin directly with Levi, which might make it look as if he were to be regarded as the first-born from now on in honor of Moses. So his older brothers are included to put him third, in his proper place.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 The heads of their respective clans.** This genealogy was not given earlier because only now (v. 13) was Aaron fully associated with Moses in the mission to Pharaoh (Gersonides). The story of Abraham is preceded by a comparable

OJPS children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips?”

¹³And the LORD spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, and gave them a charge unto the children of Israel, and unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.

¹⁴These are the heads of their fathers’ houses:

The sons of Reuben the first-born of Israel: Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and

יְהוֹנָה לְאִמֶּר הֵן בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאִשְׁמֻעַי
אֵלֵי וְאֵיף יִשְׁמַעֲנִי פֶרְעָה וְאֲנִי עֶרְל
שְׁפִתַּיִם: פ ¹³ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה
וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וַיִּצְוֶם אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל־
פֶּרְעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: ס

¹⁴ אֵלֶּה רָאשֵׁי בֵית־אֲבֹתָם
בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲנוֹךְ וּפְלוּא

ABARBANEL’S QUESTIONS ♦ What new information is added by v. 13, which seems merely to repeat what we already know? ♦ Why are the genealogies of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi given (vv. 14–25), but not those of the other tribes?

RASHBAM **14 The following are the heads of their respective clans.** The Mekilta explains that the text gives the genealogy of these three tribes, whom Jacob

IBN EZRA **Pharaoh, who is not one of Your people, heed me? A man of impeded speech.** Some think that “I will be with you ... as you speak” (4:15) means that God removed Moses’ speech impediment. But this proves that He had done so only temporarily, or that He prompted Moses to speak in such a way that he would not have to pronounce the sounds that were difficult for him.

13 The LORD spoke to both Moses and Aaron in regard to the Israelites. Jeshua b. Judah thinks this means that He told them not to lose their tempers with the Israelites, whose spirits were crushed. But this interpretation is unnecessary. Aaron is included here as Moses’ spokesman.

14 The heads of their respective clans. Rather, with OJPS, “the heads of their [Moses’ and Aaron’s] fathers’ houses.” Or perhaps “their” refers to “the Israelites” in v. 13. The list is taken from Gen. 46:9–11,

NJPS those are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Saul the son of a Canaanite woman; those are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶These are the names of Levi's sons by their lineage: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari; and the span of Levi's life was 137 years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, by their families. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel; and the span of Kohath's life was 133 years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites by their lineage.

RASHI are related to Reuben. In *Pesikta Rabbati* I have seen the following: "Because our father Jacob reproached these three tribes on his deathbed (Reuben, Gen. 49:3-4; Simeon and Levi, Gen. 49:5-7), the text gives their genealogies again here by themselves to show that they are worthy of regard."

16 The span of Levi's life. Why is this figure given? To let us know how long the period of slavery was. For as long as any of the 12 sons of Jacob remained alive, there was no slavery. "Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation" (1:6), after which "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (1:8). Levi was the last of that generation to die.

18-20 The span of Kohath's life ... the span of Amram's life. From these figures we can determine that the 400-year period of oppression mentioned in Gen. 15:13 was not restricted entirely to the Israelite settlement in Egypt, but began with the birth of Isaac. For Kohath was one of the original people who came down to Egypt. Even if you add all of Kohath's 133 years, Amram's 137 years, and the 80 years of Moses' life up until the exodus, you still do not get 400 years. And of course many of Amram's years overlap those of Kohath, and many of Moses' years overlap those of Amram. [G]

[G] Rashi shows that even by the most absurdly generous calculation (assuming that Kohath came to Egypt in his first year of life and that Amram and Moses were both born after their fathers' deaths), the Israelites could not have been in Egypt more than 350 years. See further his comments to 12:40 and Gen. 15:13.

NAHMANIDES **16 By their lineage.** For Reuben and Simeon, only those who came down to Egypt are included. But for Levi, the lineage and the ages of the ancestors of the prophets Moses and Aaron are included, out of respect for them. Moreover, since they themselves were faithful followers of the Most High, they deserved to have their lineage given just like Moses and Aaron, the "fathers of the world."

shael and Elzaphan; see Lev. 10:4). **The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph.** They appear in Num. 26:12, "The sons of Korah, however, did not die." The sons of Aaron are mentioned in 24:1, "Come up to the LORD, with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu." **Aaron's son Eliezer** is mentioned because of his own son, Phinehas. But again the sons of Ithamar are not listed here because there was no need to mention them later in the Torah.

[D] In his comment to Gen. 5:31, Rashbam explains that the "seventy weeks" of Dan. 9:24 symbolize a 490-year period from the destruction of the First Temple to that of the Second Temple.

IBN EZRA giving Reuben, who had lost the birthright, at least the honor of remaining at the beginning of the genealogy.

15 Ohad. This family died off either in Egypt or in the wilderness, for it is not mentioned in the comparable list of Num. 26:12-13. **Zohar.** This is "Zerah" of Num. 26:13.

16 Levi. This genealogy is the point of the passage, whose purpose is to describe the lineage of Moses and Aaron. Reuben and Simeon are mentioned only because they are the older brothers. Similarly, Aaron is mentioned before Moses in v. 26 because he was the older brother. **137 years.** Levi's age is given (which those of Reuben and Simeon are not) in honor of Moses and Aaron.

18 The span of Kohath's life was 133 years. His life span is given (which those of Gershon and Merari are not) in honor of God's messengers, Moses and Aaron, who were his descendants.

19 These are the families of the Levites by their heritage. These only. For those who came down from Canaan to Egypt had no more children. [C]

[C] Apparently Ibn Ezra means that those who are listed in Genesis 46 as having sons had no more sons after going down to Egypt. The Levite genealogy there is complete down to Jacob's grandsons, Gerson, Kohath, and Merari, but the grandsons had all of their children in Egypt, and hence they are listed in this chapter.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS genealogy giving his descent from Noah (Abarbanel). The unworthiness of the descendants of Reuben and Simeon demonstrates that God was right to choose Moses and Aaron for this assignment rather than someone from the elder tribes (Sforno).

OJPS Carmi. These are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman. These are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were a hundred thirty and seven

years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. ¹⁸And the sons of Kohath: Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were a hundred thirty and three years. ¹⁹And the sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations.

RASHBAM disparaged in his testament in Genesis 49, to make clear that they are nonetheless worthy of regard. But the contextual reason was to give the lineage as far as Moses and Aaron, who are in the story at this point, and as far as Korah and the sons of Uzziel, who will be in the story later in the Torah.

16 The span of Levi's life. As I have explained in my comment to Gen. 5:31, this is part of the chronological framework of the Bible. The Torah enumerates the life spans of all the generations up to Noah; then from Noah to Abraham; then those of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses. The rest of the Bible continues by enumerating the life spans of Joshua, the judges, and the kings; the 70 years of exile in Babylon; and, in Daniel, the years of the Second Temple. [D]

18-25 The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The text lists the sons of Amram, Izhar, and Uzziel, but not those of Hebron. Should you think that Hebron had no sons, Num. 26:58 makes clear that there was a "clan of the Hebronites." But none of Hebron's children are mentioned in the Torah, as are those of Amram (Aaron, Moses, and Miriam), Izhar (Korah; see Num. 16:1), and Uzziel (Mi-

חֲצֵרֹן וּבְנֵי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת רְאוּבֵן: ¹⁵וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יִמְוָאֵל וַיַּמִּין וְאֶהֱדָר וַיִּכִּין וַיִּזְחָר וְשָׁאוּל בֶּן־הַכְּנַעֲנִית אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת שִׁמְעוֹן: ¹⁶וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי־לֵוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם גֶּרְשֹׁן וְקָהָת וּמֶרָרִי וּשְׁנֵי חָיִי לֵוִי שִׁבְעָ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה: ¹⁷בְּנֵי גֶרְשֹׁן לְבָנֵי וּשְׁמַעִי לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם: ¹⁸וּבְנֵי קָהָת עֲמָרָם וַיִּזְחָר וְחֶבְרֹן וְעִזְיָאֵל וּשְׁנֵי חָיִי קָהָת שְׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָת שָׁנָה: ¹⁹וּבְנֵי מֶרָרִי מַחְלִי וּמוֹשִׁי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת הַלֵּוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why are the ages of Levi (v. 16), Kohath (v. 18), and Amram (v. 20) given, but not those of anyone else?

NJPS ²⁰Amram took to wife his father's sister Jochebed, and she bore him Aaron and Moses; and the span of Amram's life was 137 years. ²¹The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³Aaron took to wife Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. Those are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵And Aaron's son Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters, and she bore him Phinehas. Those are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites by their families.

²⁶It is the same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring forth the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop." ²⁷It was they who spoke to Pharaoh

RASHI **20 His father's sister Jochebed.** A daughter of Levi and sister of Kohath.

23 Sister of Nahshon. Since she is already identified by her father's name, we learn from the inclusion of her brother's name as well that one should check out the brothers of one's future wife.

25 One of Putiel's daughters. He was a descendant of Jethro who fattened (*pittem*) calves for idolatry, and of Joseph who mastered (*pitpet*) his sexual urge.

26 The same Aaron and Moses mentioned in v. 20 are the ones in our story. The two names are sometimes cited with Aaron first, and sometimes with Moses first, to indicate that the two were of equal stature. **Troop by troop.** The troops were organized by tribes.

27 It was they who spoke to Pharaoh. It was they who were commanded (v. 26) and they who fulfilled the command. **The same Moses and Aaron.** The expression "the

NAHMANIDES **23 Aaron took to wife Elisheba.** Just as the mother of the prophets Moses and Aaron is mentioned, out of respect for them, and to make clear that she was a descendant of the righteous Levi, and to hint that a great miracle was done for her, [G] so the mother of the priesthood is mentioned, who was connected to the royal house [H] and sister of its prince.

25 One of Putiel's daughters. She is mentioned out of respect for her son Phinehas, who earned the priesthood on his own (Num. 25:13), not just as a descendant of Aaron. If "Putiel" is simply a name, the point of mentioning the name of a man whom we don't know remains unexplained. Therefore the Sages offered the comment mentioned by Rashi. But the mention must be a flattering one, for his descendants earned eternal priesthood by their righteousness. Treating the text straightforwardly, however, we might simply point out that Scripture mentions the names of the kings' mothers; e.g., 1 Kings 15:2, 2 Chron. 20:31, and so on. Or it may be that in his time Putiel was well known and respected, and his name was included to flatter the priests. The text says "one of Putiel's daughters" rather than "Putiel's daughter" either because he had many daughters and he selected the one to be married to Eleazar, or because she was not his daughter but his granddaughter, her relation to him being noted because of his fame. This would explain why her own name was not given.

[G] With respect to her age. See Nahmanides' comment to Gen. 46:15. [H] The tribe of Judah, from which David would come.

27 Moses and Aaron. Once their speaking to Pharaoh is mentioned, Moses is given precedence, since he spoke face to face with

[D] See Rashbam's comment. [E] See comment to v. 25. [F] The "secret" is the explanation for why the priests are descended from Aaron, not Moses—because of their respective wives. See Nahmanides' comment. [G] See 1 Chron. 6:18–23. Note also that Psalms 42, 44–49, 84–85, and 88 are attributed to the sons of Korah. [H] See Ibn Ezra's comment to 4:13.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **20 His father's sister.** How could God agree to have a man as great as Moses come from a marriage that would later be forbidden (Lev. 18:12)? A leader must carry some baggage that will prevent him from lording it over the public. David's Moabite ancestry served the same function (Hizkuni).

23 Aaron took to wife Elisheba. Moses' wife has already been identified in 2:21 (Gersonides).

OJPS ²⁰And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were a hundred and thirty and seven years. ²¹And the sons of Izhar: Korah, and Nepheg, and Zichri. ²²And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael, and Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³And Aaron took him Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, to wife; and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ²⁴And the sons of Korah: Assir, and Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵And Eleazar Aaron's son took him one of the daughters of Putiel to wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.

²⁶These are that Aaron and Moses, to whom the LORD said: "Bring out the children of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." ²⁷These are they

RASHBAM **27 It was they who spoke ... the same Moses and Aaron.** For when it came to speaking to Pharaoh, Moses took

IBN EZRA **20 The span of Amram's life was 137 years.** Again, this is given in honor of his sons.

21 The sons of Izhar. They are mentioned because of Korah, who would quarrel with Moses.

22 The sons of Uzziel. They are included because Mishael and Elzaphan are singled out to their credit in Lev. 10:4. But the text did not bother to include the sons of Hebron. [D]

23 Aaron took to wife Elisheba. She is mentioned in Eleazar's honor. [E] **Sister of Nahshon.** This is mentioned on account of the secret of the priesthood. [F]

24 The sons of Korah. They are mentioned since, unlike their father, they were righteous men: "The sons of Korah ... did not die" (Num. 26:11). The prophet Samuel was a descendant of Korah. [G]

25 Eleazar took to wife one of Putiel's daughters. She is mentioned in honor of Phinehas, to whose descendants was given eternal priesthood (Num. 25:10–13). It is therefore obvious that Putiel must have been an Israelite. But we do not know the meaning of Putiel, any more than we do that of Mishael or even that of Aaron. In fact, if not for 2:10, we would not even know why Moses was called Moses.

26 Aaron and Moses. Aaron is mentioned first because he was older. Moreover, he prophesied to Israel before Moses did. [H]

precedence, since he spoke face to face with

NJPS king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moses and Aaron. ²⁸For when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt ²⁹and the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you," ³⁰Moses appealed to the LORD, saying, "See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!"

7 The LORD replied to Moses, "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet. ²You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall

RASHI same" implies that their righteousness in performing their assignment from God remained "the same" from beginning to end.

28 For when the LORD spoke. This verse is the first half of a sentence that is continued in v. 29. [H]

29 The LORD said to Moses. This verse is a repetition of v. 11. The text resumes after the interruption of the genealogical information by repeating it. **I am the LORD.** I am competent to send you and to carry out the things I sent you to say.

30 Moses appealed to the LORD. This is the repetition of v. 12. Such "repetitive resumption" is standard. It is like a man saying to his friend, "Now let's return to the original subject."

7:1 I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh. Judge and chastiser, to chastise him with blows and suffering. **As your prophet.** Following Onkelos, "as your interpreter." Such is the biblical prophet: one who announces words of rebuke to the people. Etymologically *navi*, "prophet," comes from the verb *nuv*, "to bear fruit," as used in Isa. 57:19 and Prov. 10:31. [I]

2 You shall repeat. You shall repeat each message once, exactly as you heard it from [H] The comma in the translations makes this clear. Rashi emphasizes the point because the traditional Hebrew text inserts a break at this point, even though it is the middle of a sentence. [I] This is no longer considered accurate.

NAHMANIDES **28 When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.** It may be that this is not the first half of a sentence that continues in v. 29, but the end of the sentence that begins in v. 27. OJPS makes this possibility somewhat clearer: "These are that Moses and Aaron. And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt." ("That" at the beginning of v. 29 in OJPS is not in the Hebrew.) Vv. 26–27 might lead one to think that God spoke equally to both Aaron and Moses; v. 28 makes clear that God spoke to Moses and that it was only the command to bring the Israelites out of Egypt that applied equally to both Aaron and Moses. This would account for the division between the *aliyot* being made at the end of v. 28.

29 I am the LORD. See my comment to v. 13.

7:2 You shall repeat. Rashi's comment is completely wrong.

pearance of an angel. [J] And Aaron will be the prophet. This is the response to Moses' fear (6:30) that Pharaoh would not listen to him. God speaks to the prophet, and the prophet to the people. Those who say that *navi*, "prophet," comes from the verb *nuv* ("to bear fruit"), as in Isa. 57:19, are incorrect. For *nuv* is biconsonantal (in the terminology of the French grammarians) or hollow (in the terminology of the Spanish), but *navi* is from the triconsonantal root נבא.

2 You shall repeat to Aaron all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh. When Moses goes to

[I] But our case is even more surprising, since the division between the 2nd and 3rd *aliyot* actually occurs in the middle of a sentence. [J] The long commentary explains somewhat less extravagantly, "I have raised you so high that in Pharaoh's eyes you will be considered on the level of an angel."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.** This was the moment when Moses was given prophetic precedence over Aaron, as the arrangement of their names shows. That is why the break between sections occurs after this verse. For the section breaks undoubtedly derive from Moses by divine inspiration (Abarbanel).

30 I am of impeded speech. God's instruction in v. 29, "Speak to Pharaoh," made Moses think that his association with Aaron was only for speaking to Israel. Hence he repeated this argument to God (Abarbanel).

OJPS that spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These are that Moses and Aaron. ²⁸And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spoke unto Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹that the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: "I am the LORD; speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak unto thee." ³⁰And Moses said before the LORD: "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?"

7 And the LORD said unto Moses: "See, I have set thee in God's stead to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. ²Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aaron thy brother shall

RASHBAM precedence. But v. 26, following the genealogy, lists them in birth order, with Aaron taking precedence.

30 How then should Pharaoh heed me? Vv. 29–30 repeat vv. 11–12, which introduce the topic but cut it short in order to include the genealogy introducing Moses and Aaron before they speak to Pharaoh.

7:1 Your prophet. Your spokesman.

IBN EZRA God, while Aaron was merely a prophet; as God says, "When a prophet of the LORD arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses" (Num. 12:6–7). Notice that Aaron twice refers to Moses as "my lord" (32:22; Num. 12:11). From this point on, you will not find the expression "Aaron and Moses" anywhere in the Torah, the Prophets, or the Writings, except when their genealogy is discussed (Num. 3:1 and 26:59; 1 Chron. 5:29 and 23:13).

28 For when ... It is amazing that the editor of the text separated this verse from v. 29, when (as the translations show) the two verses clearly make up a single sentence. The same phenomenon occurs at Deut. 2:16–17. [I] Perhaps the paragrapher had a reason for doing so, his intellect being more expansive than ours.

30 See, I am of impeded speech. Some think that Moses said this to God twice (see v. 12), but that God did not answer him (7:1) until he repeated it. But in fact v. 30 picks up the story at the point of interruption.

7:1 In the role of God. With the ap-

NJPS speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. ⁴When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements. ⁵And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand

RASHI My mouth, and your brother Aaron shall articulate it elegantly in Pharaoh's ears.

3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. Because he has spoken disdainfully [I] of Me, and it is clear to Me that gentiles take no satisfaction in wholehearted repentance, it is best that his heart be hardened in order that I might perform many wonders against him, so you Israelites will recognize My might. — Such is God's method: He punishes the other nations so that Israel will heed and fear Him. Thus it says, "I wiped out nations.... And I thought that [Jerusalem] would fear Me, would learn a lesson" (Zeph. 3:6–7). Nonetheless, for the first five plagues the text says not "The LORD stiffened Pharaoh's heart" but "Pharaoh's heart stiffened."

4 My hand. Literally—to strike them with it.

[I] The translation "disdainfully" assumes that Rashi is thinking of "Who is the LORD that I should heed Him?" (5:2). Some commentators think Rashi meant that Pharaoh spoke "confrontationally" when he boasted, "The Nile is mine, and I made it" (Ezek. 29:9).

NAHMANIDES 3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. According to Exodus Rabbah, God here reveals to Moses that He intends to harden Pharaoh's heart in order to give him the punishment he deserves for having enslaved the Israelites so harshly. The midrash adds: "'I have hardened his heart' (10:1). R. Johanan said: This gives heretics an opening to say that he had no opportunity to repent. R. Simeon b. Lakish said: The heretics can just shut up. 'At scoffers He scoffs' (Prov. 3:34). God warns a man once, twice, even thrice, and he does not repent? At that point, God locks the door of repentance on him in order to punish him for his sin. Thus it was with Pharaoh the wicked. The Holy One messaged him five times, [I] and he paid no attention. The Holy One said to him: You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; now I will add uncleanness to your own uncleanness."

This midrash answers the question that everyone asks. If God hardened his heart, what was his sin? There are two explanations for it, and both are true. One is that Pharaoh, having done such evil to Israel for no reason, deserved to have the way of repentance blocked to him, as is shown by numerous verses both in the Torah and in the rest of the Bible, and was being punished for his original deeds. The second explanation is that half the plagues against him—those where it is not said that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" but that "Pharaoh became stubborn" (and the like)—were indeed justified, by his refusal to honor God by letting the Israelites go. But when the plagues grew worse and he could no longer stand them, his heart softened, and he was convinced to let them go—but by the severity of the plagues, not to do the will of his Creator. It was at that point that God hardened his spirit and toughened his heart, "in order that His fame might resound throughout the world" (9:16). "Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations" (Ezek. 38:23). When God says already before the plagues, "I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go" (4:21), He is informing Moses of what he is going to do in the last five plagues. God, after all, already knows that Pharaoh will refuse to let them go until he is forced (3:19). And indeed, in the last five plagues, and also at the splitting of the sea, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. "Like channeled water is the mind of the king in the LORD's hand; He directs it to whatever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1).

[I] With the first five plagues.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 7:3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. The moral question is posed even more sharply in the case of Sihon in Deut. 2:30: "King Sihon of Heshbon refused to let us pass through, because the LORD had stiffened his will and hardened his heart in order to deliver him into your power." There are three answers to the question of why Pharaoh was not allowed to repent: (1) Pharaoh and the Egyptians still deserved punishment for what they did to Israel; (2) the availability of repentance is a grace given by God specifically to Israel, the nation that is under his particular providence; (3) but the most correct answer is simply that God did not (God forbid!) harden Pharaoh's heart directly, but indirectly by inflicting plagues upon him and then removing them, letting Pharaoh think that they were therefore not from God (Abarbanel). Since Pharaoh would undoubtedly have let the Israelites go immediately simply because he could not bear the plagues, God hardened his heart for two purposes: first, to give the Egyptians an opportunity for repentance, and second, so that Israel should see and fear the Lord, and so that "you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the LORD" (10:2). Had Pharaoh sincerely wanted to repent, nothing would have prevented it (Sforno).

וְאֶהְרֶן אֶחָיו יְדַבֵּר אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וְשַׁלַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: ³וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-אֲתֹנִי מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴וְלֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵכֶם פַּרְעֹה וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-יָדֵי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-עַבְדֵּי אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: ⁵וְיָדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּנֹתְתִי אֶת-יָדֵי עַל-מִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ As readers of this text have asked from the very beginning—if God hardened Pharaoh's heart (v. 3), what was his sin? ♦ How is v. 4 anything other than a repetition of v. 3?

OJPS speak unto Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land. ³And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴But Pharaoh will not hearken unto you, and I will lay My hand upon Egypt, and bring forth My hosts, My people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt, by great judgments. ⁵And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I

RASHBAM 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. Their lord and ruler. For up to this point their attitude was, "I do not know the LORD" (5:2).

IBN EZRA Pharaoh, even if Aaron is not mentioned we know that they always went together.

3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. Many have wondered how Pharaoh can be considered to have sinned if God hardened his heart. Some great minds reply that what God did was to strengthen Pharaoh's ability to bear his troubles. [K] My answer is that God gives man wisdom and plants within his heart the intelligence to receive a higher power that enables him to increase his pleasure, or to lessen his pain. I will explain this further in my comments to 33:23 and Deut. 5:26.

4 My hand. My blows, which (among humans) are given with the hand. **My ranks.** Saadia believes that "Hosts" in the term "LORD of Hosts" refers to Israel; note the OJPS "My hosts" here. But I believe it refers to the "hosts of heaven." Just as the angels are God's ranks in heaven, the Israelites are His ranks on earth.

5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. The purpose of the blows to be inflicted is to spread His fame throughout the world.

[K] In the long commentary, this opinion is attributed to Jeshua b. Judah, and is rejected. The short commentary adds no more at this point than the citation to Deuteronomy.

NJPS over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst.” ⁶“This Moses and Aaron did; as the LORD commanded them, so they did. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they made their demand on Pharaoh.

⁸The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹“When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, ‘Produce your marvel,’ you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.’ It shall turn into a serpent.” ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as the LORD had commanded: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men

RASHI **9 Marvel.** A sign to prove that the one who sends you has power. **A serpent.** A snake.

11 By their spells. The Hebrew word *b'lahateihem* is unique, occurring only here

NAHMANIDES **11 The wise men.** The wise men were the leaders and the elders, those who were “wise” in conjuring and summoning demons. **The Egyptian magicians.** The term includes both the “wise men” and the “sorcerers.” The etymology of the Hebrew word is unknown; see the comment of Ibn Ezra. But Rashi’s suggestion (in his comment to Gen. 41:8) that it is Aramaic for “necromancers,” those who work themselves into a frenzy by using the

OJPS stretch forth My hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” ⁶And Moses and Aaron did so; as the LORD commanded them, so did they. ⁷And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spoke unto Pharaoh.

מתוכם: ⁶ ויעש משה ואהרן כאשר צוה יהוה אתם בן עשו: ⁷ ומשה בן-שמונים שנה ואהרן בן-שלוש ושמנים שנה בדברם אל-פרעה: ⁸ ויאמר יהוה אל-משה ואל-אהרן לאמר: ⁹ כי ידבר אלכם פרעה לאמר: הנו לכם מופת ואמרת אל-אהרן קח את-מטה והשליך לפני-פרעה ויהי לתנין: ¹⁰ ויבא משה ואהרן אל-פרעה ויעשו כן כאשר צוה יהוה וישלך אהרן את-מטהו לפני פרעה ולפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין: ¹¹ ויקרא גם-פרעה לחכמים ולמכשפים

⁸ ויאמר יהוה אל-משה ואל-אהרן לאמר: ⁹ כי ידבר אלכם פרעה לאמר: הנו לכם מופת ואמרת אל-אהרן קח את-מטה והשליך לפני-פרעה ויהי לתנין: ¹⁰ ויבא משה ואהרן אל-פרעה ויעשו כן כאשר צוה יהוה וישלך אהרן את-מטהו לפני פרעה ולפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין: ¹¹ ויקרא גם-פרעה לחכמים ולמכשפים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why is Aaron included in the instructions (vv. 8–9) for the marvel of the serpent, but in none of the others? ♦ What made God so sure (v. 9) that Pharaoh (who had no desire even to listen to them, and who had told them in 5:4, “Get to your labors!”) would ask them to produce a marvel? ♦ Why is the same trick that is previously called a “sign” now called a “marvel”? ♦ Why must Aaron perform the marvel with his rod rather than Moses with his, as previously instructed? ♦ Why does the rod here turn into a “serpent” rather than a “snake”? ♦ Why did they perform this marvel (v. 10) without first warning Pharaoh that it was about to happen, as they did with all the previous ones? ♦ If this marvel could only be performed through the power of God, “who alone works great marvels” (Ps. 136:4), how were the magicians (v. 11) able to do it?

⁸And the LORD spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying: ⁹“When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying: Show a wonder for you; then thou shalt say unto Aaron: Take thy rod, and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it become a serpent.” ¹⁰And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so, as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh also called for the

IBN EZRA **6 This Moses and Aaron did.** This is a general statement indicating that all of the plagues were performed by both Aaron and Moses. Later, each plague will be described individually.

7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three. These are the only prophets anywhere in the Bible who are identified as prophesying in their old age. For they were of greater stature than any other prophet. The others were prophets of reproof, or foretold the future, but only to Moses and Aaron did God speak from a pillar of cloud, and it is through them that the righteous inherit the World To Come.

8 Moses and Aaron. God knew that the first time (5:2) Pharaoh would merely

deny knowing the Lord; only now would he demand a marvel, requiring Aaron’s involvement. [L]

9 Take your rod. A number of intelligent commentators are under the mistaken impression that there are three rods, but there is just one, referred to in different ways, depending on the context. It is called “the rod of God” (4:20) because of the signs that God showed Moses with it, not (as some say) because the name of God was carved on it. The rod itself had no intrinsic power; after all, even though Moses stretched it out to begin the plague of locusts (10:13), the locusts did not actually come until God drove them in with the east wind. The same thing happened at the splitting of the sea (14:21). With the plagues of the animal swarms, pestilence, boils, and the slaying of the first-born, there is no mention of the rod at all, nor with the appearance of the manna, which involved 10 miracles all by itself. It is referred to as Moses’ rod (e.g., in 9:23, “Moses held out his rod toward the sky”) because Moses performed the signs with it. The same applies whether Moses is performing an “upper” sign, holding his arm out toward the sky (presumably in 10:22, for the plague of darkness, he is holding the rod as he did for the others) or a “lower” one, holding the rod over the land or sea. And it is called Aaron’s rod because of the signs performed by him at God’s command to Moses. Note that the same rod is associated both with Moses and with Aaron in 17:5, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘... take along the rod with which you struck the Nile,’” an action that was performed by Aaron (7:19–20). But all of Aaron’s signs (the serpent, the Nile, the frogs, and the lice) are of the “lower” sort. The necessity to hold out the rod might be to show the onlookers that the one holding the rod is performing the sign. Finally, the first and last signs—turning into a snake (4:3) and producing almond blossoms (Num. 17:23)—were performed by the rod on its own!

10 A serpent. Whereas in the sign Moses was given for the Israelites (4:3), it merely turned into a snake. But according to Japheth b. Ali the snake and the serpent are the same thing.

11 Wise men. The astrologers. **Sorcerers.** Those who “change” natural objects by fooling the eye. **Magicians.** Those who actually

[L] Ibn Ezra assumes that Aaron had to be commanded only when the signs needed to be performed; see his comment at v. 6.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **6 So they did.** Even though it meant taking their lives in their hands (Hizkuni).

7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three. One does not send emotional youngsters to the king for such a task, but elders who have acquired wisdom (Abarbanel). Despite their old age, they rose early to do their Creator’s will with alacrity. Even in those days, 80 was quite old, as we learn from Moses’ own words: “A prayer of Moses.... The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years” (Ps. 90:1,10) (Sforno).

9 Produce your marvel. I know the man; he will insist that you perform a miracle to confirm your bona fides. But do not do so; simply perform the “sign” that I showed you (Abarbanel). **A serpent.** Hinting that Pharaoh, the “mighty serpent” of Ezek. 29:3, will be swallowed up and eliminated from the world (Bekhor Shor).

11 Magicians. Since to this day nothing is known to us about the nature of magic, there is no point in discussing it (Gersonides). The existence of magic is established by the Torah and confirmed by our Sages (Abarbanel).

NAHPS and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magicians, in turn, did the same with their spells; ¹²each cast down his rod, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's rod swallowed their rods. ¹³Yet Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them, as the LORD had said.

¹⁴And the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is coming out to the water, and station yourself before him at the edge of the Nile, taking with you the rod that

RASHI in the Bible (see my comment to v. 22). The linguistic connection with "the fiery [lahat] ever-turning sword" (Gen. 3:24) suggests that the word in that verse might really mean that the sword was kept "ever-turning" by a magic spell.

12 Aaron's rod swallowed their rods. After turning back into a rod, it swallowed them all.

14 Stubborn. This word is indeed an adjective, not a verb as Onkelos makes it.

15 As he is coming out to the water. To relieve himself. For he pretended to be a god, who had no need to relieve himself; so he would get up early every morning and do it in the Nile.

NAHMANIDES bones of the dead, is plausible. For it is known that magical skill primarily involves the bones of the dead, or animal bones; see B. Sanh. 65b. **Their spells.** According to our Sages, this refers to magic performed by destructive angels. The word is derived from the root להט, meaning "burn," because spells are performed by "burners," fiery angels who can set fire to a man without his even realizing he is burning: "It blazed upon them all about, but they heeded not; it burned among them, but they gave it no thought" (Isa. 42:25). Note the "chariots of fire" that Elisha's servant sees—when Elisha prays that God open his eyes—in 2 Kings 6:17. Perhaps these "burners" are the angels who dwell in the air, in the spheres of the elements, [IJ] who are called "rulers." I will have more to say on this subject later, with the help of God, my Rock. But they say that the differently written word translated "spells" in 7:22 means that they were performed by means of demons, and is derived from לט, meaning "secretly," for that is how demons operate, being creatures whose bodies are made of air and can therefore not be sensed.

[IJ] Earth, air, fire, and water.

actually "do" it except from their own perspective. Some great minds have decided that God performed this wonder merely by removing the dryness of the rod. They have also told stories that they made up themselves about the swallowing of the rods, and do not realize that "all their wisdom is swallowed up" (Ps. 107:27). They "vexed the Holy One of Israel" (Ps. 78:41)! But we believe that it happened just as the text says, though we don't grasp how it happened. For there are many things in nature that the wise men of the world do not understand, like stones that attract iron, neutralize acid, make sounds, or gather straw; or the electric eel. All the more so with things still more wonderful than this, as I have explained in my commentary on the book of Job.

12 Aaron's rod. It is called his "rod" rather than his "serpent" because that is what it originally was. But Jeshua b. Judah says that it reverted to being a rod and then swallowed them, which would be a great marvel. **Swallowed their rods.** A second miracle—after turning into a serpent, it swallowed the magicians' rods and they disappeared.

13 Pharaoh's heart stiffened. Of its own accord, once he had seen that the magicians did what Aaron did.

14 Is stubborn. This is a stative verb.

15 As he is coming out to the water. It is the custom of the king of Egypt to this day to go out in July and August, which is the flood season, to check on the level of the Nile. God commanded Moses to perform this marvel with the Nile in Pharaoh's sight while he was out there.

[M] And can actually perform feats, by natural processes, that astound the less knowledgeable. [N] Actually it is Aaron who performs this feat, as Moses' "prophet."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 12 They turned into serpents. In form and appearance. But they were not able to move like serpents (Sforno). **Swallowed their rods.** Proving that it was a real serpent, not an illusion as theirs were. This should have been enough to convince Pharaoh (Gersonides).

15 Coming out to the water. It is the custom of nobles and kings to go hawking by the riverbanks. Moses could speak to him there because there would not be many people around (Bekhor Shor). Some explain this to mean that Moses should take the opportunity to speak to him outside the palace, in order not to invoke God's name in a place full of idols (Hizkuni). As one goes out in the morning for a stroll to warm the body before eating. According to Ibn Kaspi, it was and still is the custom of the king of Egypt to go out with his courtiers on Tuesdays and Saturdays to play ball at a particular spot along the Nile from morning until it is time to eat (Abarbanel).

ויעשו גם הם חרטמי מצרים בלהטיהם
בן: 12 וישליכו איש מטוה ויהיו לתנינים
ויבלע מטה אהרן את מטתם: 13 ויהיו
לב פרעה ולא שמע אלהם כאשר דבר
יהוה: פ

14 ויאמר יהוה אל משה כבד לב פרעה
מאן לשלח העם: 15 לך אל פרעה בבקר
הנה יצא המימה ונצבת לקראתו על-
שפת היאר והמטה אשר נהפך לנחש

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why did God have to tell Moses that Pharaoh refused (v. 14), which he already knew?

OJPS wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did in like manner with their secret arts. ¹²For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents; but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods. ¹³And Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken.

¹⁴And the LORD said unto Moses: "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn, he refuseth to let the people go. ¹⁵Get thee unto Pharaoh in the morning; lo, he goeth out unto the water; and thou shalt stand by the river's brink to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent shalt thou

RASHBAM 13 Pharaoh's heart stiffened. Assuming that Aaron did what he did by magic as well.

14 Stubborn. Technically, the word is a stative verb, not an adjective; these are often used to describe the state or condition that a person is in. It implies, "Pharaoh made himself (or, with OJPS, his heart) stubborn." [E]

15 As he is coming out to the water. As is the custom of rulers, to go out in the morning and ride here and there.

[E] The contradiction of this remark (which uses an active verb) with his grammatical explanation (which calls the verb in our verse a stative, that is, passive, verb) is unexplained. Note that Rashbam distinguishes between Pharaoh's heart stiffening on its own and Pharaoh stiffening it himself; see his comment to v. 22.

IBN EZRA know the secrets of nature. [M] The Hebrew word probably derives from Egyptian or Babylonian, for it is used in the Bible only in connection with these two peoples. **Did the same.** But actually the text itself makes clear that, unlike Moses [N], the magicians performed their action only "with their spells." The Hebrew etymology of "spells" makes clear that the reference is only to sleight-of-hand, which fools the eye for a moment. So they did not

NIPS turned into a snake. ¹⁶And say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let My people go that they may worship Me in the wilderness." But you have paid no heed until now. ¹⁷Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." See, I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand, and it will be turned into blood; ¹⁸and the fish in the Nile will die. The Nile will stink so that the Egyptians will find it impossible to drink the water of the Nile."

¹⁹And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt—its rivers, its canals, its ponds, all its bodies of water—that they may turn to blood; there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone." ²⁰Moses and

RASHI **16 Until now.** Thus far. The midrash interprets it to mean, You will not heed me until the word "thus"—the word that begins the phrase "thus says the Lord" in which God announces the killing of the first-born.

17 It will be turned into blood. Since it never rains in Egypt, and the earth is watered only by the flooding of the Nile, the Egyptians worship it. So He struck first at their god, and only then did He strike them.

18 The Egyptians will find it impossible. Rather, in accordance with the usual meaning of this Hebrew word, they will be *helpless* to seek healing for the waters of the Nile in order to make them fit to drink.

19 Say to Aaron. Since the Nile had defended Moses when he was cast into it as a baby, it was not struck by his hand, neither in the plague of blood nor in that of frogs. It was struck by Aaron instead. **Its rivers, its canals.** When the Nile rises, its water goes up by canals and irrigates the fields. **Throughout the land of Egypt.** Even in the bathhouses and the bathtubs in private homes.

NAHMANIDES **16 You have paid no heed until now.** This is the warning that God will now switch from mere marvels to harmful plagues. Pharaoh has brought them on himself by not obeying the commands of his Creator. Since saying, "I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go" (5:2), Pharaoh has not explicitly announced that he would not heed God or let Israel go. He did not even rebuke Moses and Aaron, merely listened to them in silence. For from the moment they turned the rod into a serpent that swallowed the rods of his magicians, he had been afraid of the potential plagues. But with the first plagues he tried to have the magicians imitate them, assuming they were magic. He was afraid, but strengthened his resolve; hence "when the Egyptian magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened" (v. 22).

duplicated construct form of "water" used here, *meme-*, indicates fresh water, while the standard *me-* indicates salt water. But he forgets Josh. 4:7, where *me-* refers to the waters of the Jordan. In any case, *meme-* is always used whenever the word has a pronominal suffix. **Its rivers.** There are other rivers in Egypt than the Nile. **Its canals.** Literally, "its Niles"—for the Nile runs in many channels. **Its ponds.** Where rainwater collects. **All its bodies of water.** Man-made fountains, wells, and cisterns. **Vessels of wood or stone.** Such as troughs and basins in gardens and palaces, where there is always water.

20 He lifted up the rod. In my opinion, v. 19 makes clear that it was Aaron who lifted up the rod and struck the Nile. **The water in**

OJPS take in thy hand. ¹⁶And thou shalt say unto him: The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, hath sent me unto thee, saying: Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness; and, behold, hitherto thou hast not hearkened; ¹⁷thus saith the LORD: In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD—behold, I will smite with the rod that is in my hand upon the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. ¹⁸And the fish that are in the river shall die, and the river shall become foul; and the Egyptians shall loathe to drink water from the river."

¹⁹And the LORD said unto Moses: "Say unto Aaron: Take thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their ponds of water, that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone." ²⁰And Moses and

RASHBAM **16 By this you shall know that I am the LORD.** Since you made a point of saying, "I do not know the LORD" (5:2).

18 The Egyptians will find it impossible. As I explained in my comment to Gen. 19:11, the verb is a synonym of "will not be able"; in French we call it *ennui*. [F]

20 In the sight of Pharaoh. This

[F] The Biblical Hebrew word can refer to weariness or helplessness.

IBN EZRA **16 Say to him.** This speech was necessary because it was to announce the first of the plagues (if Pharaoh would not heed). The rod that turned into a serpent was a marvel, but not a plague.

17 By this you shall know. By the fact that I strike the water with the rod and turn it into blood. **The rod that is in my hand.** Even though (according to v. 19) the rod was to be in Aaron's hand, the text treats them interchangeably in performing the sign.

18 The fish. A generic term, inclusive of everything that swarms in the water. **Will find it impossible.** Will not be able. The verb is from the root לאה. Some think the word *lo* ("not") is from this root, but that is farfetched.

19 Hold out your arm in every direction. **Over the waters of Egypt.** This is the general statement, which is then specified. According to Saadia, the unusual re-

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **19 Its rivers.** All the rivers of Egypt are branches of the Nile (Abarbanel). **Its canals.** Note that the Nile is also called "the Canal." The same word is used in Dan. 12:5 for the Tigris (Kimhi).

20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. Moses struck the Nile (v. 17) and Aaron struck as much of the rest of the water in Egypt (v. 19) as he could find (Abarbanel).

NJPS Aaron did just as the LORD commanded: he lifted up the rod and struck the water in the Nile in the sight of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and all the water in the Nile was turned into blood ²¹and the fish in the Nile died. The Nile stank so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt. ²²But when the Egyptian magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them—as the LORD had spoken. ²³Pharaoh turned and went into his palace, paying no regard even to this. ²⁴And all the Egyptians had to dig round about the Nile for drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the Nile.

RASHI **22 Spells.** The Hebrew word is written differently from that used in v. 11; the one used here implies something whispered in secret. The Sages interpret this word to mean actions performed by demons, and the one in v. 11 to mean actions performed by magic. **Pharaoh's heart stiffened.** He said to them, "Would you carry straw to Hafaraim? [K] You are bringing magic to Egypt, a land that is full of magic!"

23 Even to this. "This" refers to the marvel of the staff that turned into a serpent, not to the plague of blood. [L]

[K] According to B. Men. 85a, this was the contemporary equivalent of "carrying coals to Newcastle." In the story told there, Moses retorts, "There is a common saying: 'Bring herbs to Herbtown.'" [L] To which Pharaoh had paid "no regard."

NAHMANIDES **20 He lifted up the rod and struck the water.** He stretched his hand out over the land of Egypt in every direction and then struck the Nile. The water in the Nile was turned to blood before Pharaoh's eyes, "and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt" (v. 21) as well. [K] But Ibn Ezra thinks he lifted up the rod in order to strike the water, and the text simply did not bother to record his stretching his hand out over the land of Egypt.

23 Even to this. "This" refers both to the marvel of the serpent and to the plague of blood. But more precisely it refers to the fact that this was a plague, not a mere marvel—which should have made him fear that from now on the hand of God would be upon him.

[K] The Nile because of the striking, the water in the rest of the country by stretching out the arm.

to perform this trick? Answer: We know from v. 24 that Aaron had not turned the subsurface water into blood. This is where the magicians got water. But what they did cannot be compared to what Aaron did. For he turned all the water in the land to blood for seven days, whether it was in his presence or not, even running water that was replaced every moment with new water. Whereas they merely turned a little bit of water in a container into blood, and even that changed back to water as soon as Pharaoh went home.

23 Even to this. He paid as little regard to the plague of blood as he had to the rod that became a serpent.

24 Had to dig. Many people say that in the hands of an Egyptian the water was as red as blood, but it turned clear in the hands of an Israelite. If so, why doesn't the Torah mention this phenomenon? In my opinion, the plagues of blood, frogs, and lice all affected both the Egyptians and the Hebrews. We must pursue the meaning of the text! These plagues did little damage. But for the plague of swarms, which was severe, God separated the Egyptians and the Israelites. Similarly with the hail and the pestilence (on account of their cattle), though not with the boils, [O] and not with the locusts that destroyed the crops—for they were leaving Egypt anyway. In short, just as the Egyptians had to dig for drinking water, so did the Hebrews.

[O] Ibn Ezra does not explain why the Israelites suffered from boils, but presumably he understood them to be irritating but not damaging.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **21 The Egyptians could not drink water.** Because it was polluted by the corpses of the fish killed when it turned to blood. But it had already turned back into water. This is why there was water for the magicians to turn into blood (v. 22) and why Pharaoh did not ask them to turn it back into water (Bekhor Shor).

22 Did the same. With water from somewhere in Egypt that Aaron had missed striking (Abarbanel).

OJPS Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. ²¹And the fish that were in the river died; and the river became foul, and the Egyptians could not drink water from the river; and the blood was throughout all the land of Egypt. ²²And the magicians of Egypt did in like manner with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken. ²³And Pharaoh turned and went into his house, neither did he lay even this to heart. ²⁴And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river.

יְהוָה וַיִּרְם בַּמֶּסֶה וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר
בַּיָּאֵר לַעֲיִנֵי פַרְעֹה וְלַעֲיִנֵי עֲבָדָיו וַיְהִי כִּי
כָל־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר־בַּיָּאֵר לָדָם: ²¹וַהֲדָגָה
אֲשֶׁר־בַּיָּאֵר מָתָה וַיִּבָּאֵשׁ הַיָּאֵר וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ
מִצְרַיִם לִשְׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִן־הַיָּאֵר וַיְהִי הַדָּם
בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ²²וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן חֹרְטָמֵי
מִצְרַיִם בְּלִטְיָהֶם וַיִּחָזֶק לִב־פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־
שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ²³וַיִּפֹּן
פַּרְעֹה וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא־שָׁת לְבוֹ גַּם־
לְזֹאת: ²⁴וַיִּחְפְּרוּ כָל־מִצְרַיִם סְבִיבֹת
הַיָּאֵר מַיִם לִשְׁתּוֹת כִּי לֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת
מִמֵּי הַיָּאֵר:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Was all the water in Egypt turned to blood (v. 19), or just the water of the Nile (v. 20)?

RASHBAM demonstrated to Pharaoh the honor paid to Moses: It was Aaron, his deputy, who would lift up the rod and strike. [G]

22 Pharaoh's heart stiffened. On its own, as in v. 13. But note that after the plague of frogs, in 8:11, "he [himself] hardened his heart" (OJPS). He does the same thing after the plague of insects, as the text notes: "Pharaoh became stubborn *this time also*" (8:28).

[G] Rashbam is identifying the "he" of "he lifted up the rod." But he is also offering an alternate explanation to Rashi's at v. 19.

IBN EZRA the Nile. The verse does not bother to describe this happening to all the waters of Egypt, merely saying that they "did just as the LORD commanded."

22 With their spells. The word *b'latei-hem* implies doing something in a hidden way, as when Jael killed Sisera after "she approached him stealthily [*balat*]" (Judg. 4:21). It is not the same word as that used in v. 11. **Did the same.** Some ask: Where did the magicians find any water that had not already been turned into blood, with which

NJPS 25 When seven days had passed after the LORD struck the Nile, 26 the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let My people go that they may worship Me. 27 If you refuse to let them go, then I will plague your whole country with frogs. 28 The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up and enter your palace, your bedchamber and your bed, the houses of your courtiers and your people, and your ovens and your kneading bowls. 29 The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your courtiers.'"

8 And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Hold out your arm with the rod

RASHI 25 When seven days had passed. Without the Nile turning back into water. More precisely, with OJPS, "when seven days were fulfilled." For each plague lasted a quarter of a month, and the other three-quarters of the month Moses would exhort and forewarn them.

27 I will plague. The word does not imply that death would result. The same verb is used when one of the men in a brawl accidentally "pushes" a pregnant woman (21:22).

28 They shall come up. From the Nile. **Enter your palace and then the houses of your courtiers and your people.** Since it was Pharaoh who originated the idea of "dealing shrewdly" (1:10) with the Israelites, he was punished first.

29 On you and on your people. Literally, *in you and in your people*: The frogs would get into their guts and croak.

NAHMANIDES 25 When seven days had passed. Note that the Hebrew text links this verse with what precedes it, as does OJPS. The Egyptians were unable to drink from the Nile, and had to dig around it for water, until seven days had passed.

Aaron would go with him, since Moses would not speak with Pharaoh if Aaron did not come along.

27 I will plague your whole country. That is, destroy it—"frogs to destroy them" (Ps. 78:45). **Frogs.** Some say the word translated "frog" really refers to a kind of water creature found only in the Nile called in Arabic *al-timsah*, a "crocodile," which comes out of the water and seizes people. But given that they also came from "the rivers, the canals, and the ponds" (8:1), it is more plausible that it refers to the more well-known creature.

28 Shall come up. Because the river is always lower than the city.

29 On you and on your people and on all your courtiers. According to Japheth b. Ali, this means: on them only, not on the Israelites. But this expression is no proof of that. In my opinion, it means what it says, that the frogs will come up everywhere—in his clothes and on his head. There was no need to say explicitly that they affected the Israelites as well.

8:1 Hold out your hand. In every direction. **Over the rivers, the canals, and the ponds.** Note that the phrase "all its bodies of

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 25 When seven days had passed. Each plague lasted seven days. The Torah customarily spells out the details once and leaves them to be inferred in similar circumstances (Gersonides).

26 Go to Pharaoh. Note that the plagues are divided into groups of three. In each group, for the first plague Moses is to "station" himself before Pharaoh publicly; for the second he is to "go" to Pharaoh privately; and the third he simply does in public without announcing it to Pharaoh. The first set of plagues was to convince Pharaoh of God's existence, the second set was to convince him of God's providence, the third to convince him of God's power (Abarbanel).

27 Frogs. Rather, the Hebrew word does indeed mean "crocodiles," as R. Hananel explained it. Rashi says the word "plague" here does not mean that death would result, but unless some lesser result is specified, this is just what it does mean—and frogs do not kill people. Carnivores do not live in sweet water, but God brought the crocodiles up the Nile from their habitat in the ocean off Ethiopia. Once the Nile turned to blood, the crocodiles would have to come up on land to get food (Abarbanel).

29 On you and on your people. Ibn Ezra rejects Japheth's comment that this means they did not affect the Israelites. But I think it is a fine interpretation, according with what our Sages said about *all* the plagues (Abarbanel).

8:1 Hold out your arm. To show that you control when the plague starts (Hizkuni).

OJPS 25 And seven days were fulfilled, after that the LORD had smitten the river. 26 And the LORD spoke unto Moses: "Go in unto Pharaoh, and say unto him: Thus saith the LORD: Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 27 And if thou refuse to let them go, behold, I will smite all thy borders with frogs. 28 And the river shall swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come into thy house, and into thy bed-chamber, and upon thy bed, and into the house of thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thine ovens, and into thy kneading-troughs. 29 And the frogs shall come up both upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon all thy servants."

8 And the LORD said unto Moses: "Say unto Aaron: Stretch forth thy hand

RASHBAM 25 Seven days. That is how long the plague of blood lasted.

26 The LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh." Moses twice gave warning to Pharaoh, before each of the first two plagues, but not before the third. The same is true all the way through. Every third plague (lice, boils, and darkness) takes place with no warning.

IBN EZRA 25 When seven days had passed. The plague went on for seven days. But this does not apply to the subsequent plagues. **After the LORD struck the Nile.** Despite Moses' saying, "I shall strike the water in the Nile with the rod that is in my hand" (v. 17), it was really the Lord who performed the miracle. He made it *appear* that Moses had done it so that everyone who saw him would realize that he was the messenger of God.

26 Go to Pharaoh. To his palace, not to the water. It was taken for granted that

וַיִּמְלֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרֵי הַכּוֹת־יְהוָה אֶת־הַיָּאֵר: פ 26 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פָּרְעֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי: 27 וְאִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח הַנֶּה אֲנֹכִי נֹגֵף אֶת־כָּל־גְּבוּלְךָ בַּצִּפְרֹדִים: 28 וְשַׁרְץ הַיָּאֵר צִפְרֹדִים יַעֲלוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבְחֹדֶר מִשְׁכְּבְּךָ וְעַל־מִטְתְּךָ וּבְבֵית עֲבָדֶיךָ וּבְעַמֶּךָ וּבְתַנּוּרֶיךָ וּבְמִשְׁאָרוֹתֶיךָ: 29 וּבָכָה* וּבְעַמֶּךָ וּבְכָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ יַעֲלוּ הַצִּפְרֹדִים:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן נָטָה אֶת־יָדְךָ בְּמִטְּךָ עַל־הַנְּהָרֹת

29. ו יתיר ה'

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why does this plague last seven days (v. 25), and why must its duration be given at all? ♦ Why does the plague of frogs begin with "go to Pharaoh" (v. 26), while other plagues begin with the instruction "station yourself" and still others with no such instruction? ♦ Why is v. 29 necessary?

NJPS over the rivers, the canals, and the ponds, and bring up the frogs on the land of Egypt.” ²And Aaron held out his arm over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. ³But the magicians did the same with their spells, and brought frogs upon the land of Egypt.

⁴Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Plead with the LORD to remove the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.” ⁵And Moses said to Pharaoh, “You may have this triumph over me: for what time shall I plead in behalf of you and your courtiers and your people, that the frogs be cut off from you and your houses, to remain only in the Nile?” ⁶“For tomorrow,”

RASHI 8:2 **The frogs came up.** Literally, “the frog came up.” There was just one frog. They kept hitting her, and she would squirt out swarm after swarm. Thus the midrash. But in context the explanation would seem to be that in Hebrew the singular can refer to a swarm of frogs. [M]

5 You may have this triumph over me. The Hebrew word used here means “boast,” as in Isa. 10:15. Here the implication is: “You may boast of how wise you are by asking me to do something great that (you think) I will be unable to do.” And see my comments to Deut. 4:24. **For what time shall I plead.** Not “what time” (which would have meant “when shall I plead?”) but “for what time.” That is: I will pray today on your behalf that the frogs shall be cut off at a time fixed by you. Tell me which time you choose. Then you will see whether I can fulfill my word at the time specified by you.

6 For tomorrow. Pray today that they be cut off tomorrow.

[M] As if to say, “The locust has descended on the fields.”

NAHMANIDES 8:5 **For what time shall I plead.** Rashi takes it to mean, “I will pray immediately for the plague to cease at whatever time you choose.” The straightforward reading suggests that the plagues would depart as soon as Moses prayed. See v. 9, where it says, “the LORD did as Moses asked”—not “on the next day, the LORD did as Moses asked.” Nor does our verse imply that Moses would pray immediately; “for what time” merely means “when.” The preposition “for” is used superfluously quite often in Biblical Hebrew, especially with expressions of time. **That the frogs be cut off.** “Cutting off” implies their death; see 12:19 and 1 Kings 21:21.

6 For tomorrow. See the comment of Samuel b. Hophni cited by Ibn Ezra. But in my

ness. [P] **Plead with the LORD.** This plague was much worse than the previous one—“frogs to destroy them” (Ps. 78:45).

5 You may have this triumph over me. With OJPS, “this glory.” I will let you have the glory of knowing that the whole world will see that they will be removed at exactly the moment specified by you. **To remain only in the Nile.** Where they had been to begin with. It obviously applied also to the other rivers and ponds where they had been before.

6 Tomorrow. Samuel b. Hophni explains as follows: It would have been more natural for him to say, “Immediately.” But Pharaoh

[P] Ibn Ezra assumes that Pharaoh understood that it was Moses who would intervene with God.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 3 **Brought frogs.** Brought them, but could not actually create them (Sforno).

4 Plead with the LORD. Since Pharaoh did not ask for this with the subsequent plague of lice, it is clear that he was trying to determine whether this was a natural phenomenon that Moses and Aaron knew was coming, or one that they had produced themselves (Gersonides).

5 For what time. Moses’ ability to dictate the end of the plague demonstrated that it was a divine action, not a magical one. For magic works only for a limited time, and the instant the time expires, nature returns to its normal state (Sforno). **To remain only in the Nile.** More proof that they are really crocodiles; for there are frogs everywhere, not just in the Nile (Abarbanel).

6 There is none like the LORD our God. For the stars that control the world cannot change their courses—but God can change the course of events when those who cleave to Him request it (Gersonides).

OJPS with thy rod over the rivers, over the canals, and over the pools, and cause frogs to come up upon the land of Egypt.” ²And Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt. ³And the magicians did in like manner with their secret arts, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

⁴Then Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron, and said: “Entreat the LORD, that He take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may sacrifice unto the LORD.” ⁵And Moses said unto Pharaoh: “Have thou this glory over me; against what time shall I entreat for thee, and for thy servants, and for thy people, that the frogs be destroyed from thee and thy houses, and remain in the river only?” ⁶And he said: “Against tomorrow.” And he

RASHBAM 8:5 **You may have this triumph over me.** You may set yourself above me, to ask of me what you want and have me do it. One finds the same verb when God tells Gideon, “Israel might claim for themselves the glory due to Me” (Judg. 7:2). **For what time shall I plead in behalf of you?** By what day and time do you want the frogs to be gone? I will plead, immediately, that they be dead by the time you request. For it would not be normal for them all to die at a single instant.

6 For tomorrow. Pray now that they all be dead by tomorrow.

IBN EZRA water,” referring to fountains, wells, and cisterns, is not included here.

2 Aaron held out his arm. But he did not strike the water as he did with the plague of blood. He merely signaled that the frogs could come up. **The frogs.** Literally, “the frog”; it refers to the species as a whole.

3 The magicians did the same. But only with a small amount of water. Hence Pharaoh saw that what the magicians could do was only a pale imitation of what Aaron did, and that they could only make more frogs, not eliminate them. That is why “Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron” (v. 4).

4 Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. He summoned both out of politeness.

NIPS he replied. And [Moses] said, “As you say—that you may know that there is none like the LORD our God; ⁷the frogs shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people; they shall remain only in the Nile.” ⁸Then Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh’s presence, and Moses cried out to the LORD in the matter of the frogs which He had inflicted upon Pharaoh. ⁹And the LORD did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields. ¹⁰And they piled them up in heaps, till the land stank. ¹¹But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he became stubborn and would not heed them, as the LORD had spoken.

¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Hold out your rod and strike the dust of the earth, and it shall turn to lice throughout the land of Egypt.” ¹³And they did so. Aaron held out his arm with the

RASHI 8 Moses ... left and ... cried out immediately that the frogs be cut off on the next day.

11 As the LORD had spoken. Where did He speak this? “When Pharaoh does not heed you” (7:4).

12 Say to Aaron. The dust, which had defended Moses when he killed the Egyptian (2:12) and hid him in the sand, did not deserve to be struck by him. So it was struck by Aaron.

13 Vermin. The word means “a swarm.”

NAHMANIDES view, since Moses asked, “For what time?” Pharaoh thought Moses was playing for time, and so he gave him a very short time, just until the next day. **As you say.** Since you are willing to wait until tomorrow, they shall not retreat until then.

7 The frogs shall retreat. Moses emphasizes that as soon as he prays they will all retreat, to keep Pharaoh from fearing that these frogs would die but others would come up from the Nile. The plague will depart entirely, even though some of the frogs remain in the Nile. All of this was to make clear to Pharaoh that the plague was carried out by God, and for no other reason than to make Pharaoh let Israel go.

8 Moses cried out to the LORD. That the frogs should be gone by the next day.

9 The LORD did as Moses asked. What Moses had promised Pharaoh on his own initiative.

11 Relief. As I have explained in my note to Gen. 32:17, the metaphor is one of extra space, breathing room. Thus when David would play his lyre, the evil spirit would leave Saul, and “Saul would find relief” (1 Sam. 16:23). **He became stubborn.** OJPS “He hardened his heart” gives the correct sense of the word; the grammatical formulation suggests an intense activity.

12 Say to Aaron. Know that the first three plagues, which were of the “lower” sort—two with water and one with dust—were all performed by Aaron; see my comment to 7:9. The plagues performed by Moses with the rod were of the “upper” sort—the hail and locust were brought by the wind, and the darkness was also in the air—since his status was higher than that of Aaron. Three plagues were performed without the use of the rod [Q]—the swarm, the pestilence, and the slaying of the first-born—and one, the boils, without the rod but by Moses with the slight participation of Aaron. **It shall turn to lice.** As in 9:9, the small amount of dust struck by Aaron would rise up and beget lice all over the land of Egypt.

13 They did so. Moses said it and Aaron did it. **Vermin.** The *-am* at the end of this Hebrew word is not part of the root; it is simply a [Q] That is, by God without either Aaron or Moses using the rod.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 They shall remain only in the Nile.** Moses repeats this to remind Pharaoh that the crocodiles will remain at hand should God need them again (Abarbanel).

10 The land stank. As had the water in the previous plague (7:21) (Bekhor Shor).

11 Became stubborn. He steeled himself to ignore the stink, in order not to obey God (Sforno). **Would not heed them.** I presume that they indeed came before him to ask for the Israelites’ release, that he refused, and that Moses warned him about the lice, as he had done the previous times (Gersonides).

12 Strike the dust. The third plague in each set of three was done without warning, per Job 33:29, “Truly, God does all these things two or three times to a man” (Sforno).

OJPS said: “Be it according to thy word; that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God. ⁷And the frogs shall depart from thee, and from thy houses, and from thy servants, and from thy people; they shall remain in the river only.” ⁸And Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and

Moses cried unto the LORD concerning the frogs, which He had brought upon Pharaoh. ⁹And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and the frogs died out of the houses, out of the courts, and out of the fields. ¹⁰And they gathered them together in heaps; and the land stank. ¹¹But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken.

¹²And the LORD said unto Moses: “Say unto Aaron: Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt.” ¹³And they did so; and Aaron stretched out

RASHBAM 11 He became stubborn. Rather, with OJPS, “he hardened his heart” (see my comment to 7:22). This plague was so great that his heart did not stiffen on its own, but he was so evil that he hardened it himself.

13 Vermin ... lice. Kinnam, “vermin,”

IBN EZRA believed that the alignment of the stars had brought the frogs to Egypt and that Moses knew this. So Pharaoh figured that the plague was about to come to an end anyway, and he tested Moses to see whether he could prolong it beyond its natural extent.

7 The frogs shall retreat. Moses made the promise without consulting God, confident that He would not embarrass him. **From you and your courtiers and your people.** Notice that Moses adds “your courtiers” (as in 7:29), though Pharaoh omitted them in asking (v. 4).

כִּדְבָרָךְ לְמַעַן תִּדַּע כִּי־אֵין בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ: 7 וְסָרוּ הַצְּפַרְדִּים מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתֵיךָ וּמִעֲבָדֶיךָ וּמִמֶּנּוּ רַק בַּיָּאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה: 8 וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מֵעַם פְּרָעָה וַיֵּצֵק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה עַל־דִּבְרֵי הַצְּפַרְדִּים אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם לְפָרְעָה: 9 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה כְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיָּמָתוּ הַצְּפַרְדִּים מִן־הַבְּתִים מִן־הַחֲצֵרֹת וּמִן־הַשְּׂדֹת: 10 וַיִּצְבְּרוּ אֹתָם חֲמָרִם חֲמָרִם וּתְבֹאֵשׁ הָאָרֶץ: 11 וַיֵּרָא פְּרָעָה כִּי הִיתָה הַרוּחָהּ וְהִכְבִּד אֶת־לְבּוֹ וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: 12 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן נִטָּה אֶת־מִטְּךָ וְהָךְ אֶת־עֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וְהָיָה לִכְנֶם בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: 13 וַיַּעַשׂוּכֶן וַיֵּט

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why is it so important to emphasize (vv. 5,7) that the frogs will remain in the Nile? ♦ Why does Pharaoh ask that the frogs be removed “tomorrow” (v. 6) rather than immediately? ♦ Why Moses “cry out” (v. 8) about the frogs, as if in complaint? ♦ Why does Pharaoh become “stubborn” (v. 11) rather than “stiffening” his heart as before? ♦ Why does the plague of lice (v. 13) come without warning? ♦ How does “they did so” jibe with the plague’s being performed by Aaron alone?

NJPS rod and struck the dust of the earth, and vermin came upon man and beast; all the dust of the earth turned to lice throughout the land of Egypt. ¹⁴The magicians did the like with their spells to produce lice, but they could not. The vermin remained upon man and beast; ¹⁵and the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart stiffened and he would not heed them, as the LORD had spoken.

RASHI **14 To produce lice.** To “produce” them from some other place. **But they could not.** Because demons have no power over living creatures smaller than a grain of barley. [N]

15 This is the finger of God. This plague could not have been carried out by magic—it could only have been performed by God. **As the LORD had spoken.** “When Pharaoh does not heed you” (7:4).

[N] Some manuscripts read “a lentil.”

NAHMANIDES **14 The magicians did the like with their spells to produce lice.** That is, they struck the dust as Aaron had done, and tried to conjure up the demons with their spells as they had done the other times Aaron performed a sign. Alternatively, it might mean that they did what they had previously done successfully to produce lice, but **they could not** do it this time. The reasoning behind this interpretation is that the more skilled of the magicians knew what they could and could not do, so they must have had a reason to think they could produce lice.

15 This is the finger of God! According to Ibn Ezra, this means that it was an astrologically determined disaster, having nothing to do with Israel; see his comment for the reasoning behind this notion. But I do not think he is correct. For one thing, something that happened by chance would not be called “the finger of God.” Rather, a plague of punishment is regularly called “the hand of the LORD” or “the finger of God,” as in the very verse he brings for proof: “it was not *His hand* that struck us” (1 Sam. 6:9). Notice, moreover, that this is the last time the magicians confront Moses. What it really means is just what it sounds like: When the magicians could not do the same as Aaron, they acknowledged that it was God’s doing. This is why Pharaoh did not summon them again. And they called it “the finger of God” rather than “the hand of God” to try to minimize it. They did not say “Lord” merely because that was Moses’ terminology, not theirs. The fact that they were unable to produce lice was due to deliberate interference by God, demonstrating that everything was His, and in His power. I also think that the reason they failed this time was that they were unable to actually create anything. To make blood, they

do with Israel; it is a divine blow based on the astrological position of the star of Egypt—an “act of God” in the sense of a chance occurrence. The Philistines used a similar expression when they set the Ark on an unmanned cart harnessed to two milch cows and turned them loose: “If it goes up the road to Beth-shemesh, to [God’s] own territory, it was He who has inflicted this great harm on us. But if not, we shall know that it was not His hand that struck us; it just happened to us by chance” (1 Sam. 6:9). As I have already pointed out in my comments to 3:15 and 5:2, Pharaoh and his courtiers did not deny the Creator, merely the Lord whom Moses had announced to

OJPS his hand with his rod, and smote the dust of the earth, and there were gnats upon man, and upon beast; all the dust of the earth became gnats throughout all the land of Egypt. ¹⁴And the magicians did so with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; and there were gnats upon man, and upon beast. ¹⁵Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh: “This is the finger of God”; and Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had spoken.

אֶהְיֶה אֶת־יָדוֹ בְּמַשְׁחֹו וְיִפֹּף אֶת־עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ וְתִהְיֶה הַכֹּנִים בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה כָּל־עֶפֶר הָאָרֶץ הִיָּה כֹנִים בְּכָל־אָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ¹⁴וַיַּעֲשׂוּכֶן הַחֲרָטָמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת־הַכֹּנִים וְלֹא יָכְלוּ וְתִהְיֶה הַכֹּנִים בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: ¹⁵וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲרָטָמִים אֶל־פֶּרְעֹה אַצְבָּע אֱלֹהִים הוּא וַיַּחֲזֹק לִב־פֶּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֶל־הֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ס

ABARBANEL’S QUESTIONS ♦ How are we to resolve the contradiction between “vermin came upon man and beast,” where it seems that the vermin are simply being summoned, and “the earth turned to lice,” where they are created from the earth? ♦ Why could the magicians not produce lice (v. 14)? ♦ Since the magicians could not produce lice, why does the text say that they “did the like”? ♦ Why does the text repeat (vv. 13,14; see OJPS) that “there were gnats upon man, and upon beast”? ♦ Why does Pharaoh’s heart stiffen despite the magicians’ warning (v. 15)? This is the opposite reaction from v. 11, where he became stubborn because there was relief!

RASHBAM is a singular collective noun; the *-am* at the end is simply a word ending and does not make it plural. But *kinnim*, “lice,” is plural, indicating various types of lice and fleas.

15 This is the finger of God! This is a natural calamity, not a trick performed by these two. If it had been performed by magic, we could have done it ourselves.

IBN EZRA word ending. Japheth b. Ali thinks it means “their [the Egyptians’] louse”; see Josh. 7:21 for another word that appears to have both the definite article and a possessive suffix. **All the dust of the earth ... throughout the land of Egypt.** Even though he struck the dust in a single place. The plagues of blood and boils worked the same way. It was merely a signal for the start of the plague, which was performed not by the rod, but by the One who created the earth by His power.

14 The magicians did the like. They struck the dust. **To produce lice.** From the dust of the earth, as Aaron had. **The vermin remained.** OJPS makes clear that this “phrase” repeats the expression of v. 13, “there were gnats upon man, and upon beast,” but NJPS is correct in showing that the fact that vermin remained is what prompted the magicians to say that it was God’s doing. See the next comment, however.

15 This is the finger of God! The exclamation point is misleading; see OJPS. They meant, This plague was performed by the God of the world, not by Moses, for it affected animals as well as humans. They told Pharaoh, “This plague has nothing to

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **14 The magicians did the like.** It seems to me they did not want to produce them, but to get rid of them. Under the assumption that Moses had produced them by magic, they “did the like” to get rid of them. When they could not, they realized it was God, not magic, that had produced them. Our Sages say that demons have no power over anything smaller than a lentil; but this is not the kind of comment one can argue with (Bekhor Shor). It is not because demons have no power over anything smaller than a grain of barley; if it were, they would have had no problem dealing with the swarms of v. 20 (Hizkuni). With due respect to the learning of Nahmanides, what this means is that, like Aaron, they *did* produce lice, but unlike Moses **they could not** get rid of them once produced (Abarbanel). **They could not.** Apparently “magic” was unable to fool the eye when it came to something that small; this is the point of the Sages’ remark (Gersonides).

15 Pharaoh’s heart stiffened. The lice came from dust, but there was none in his palace, which had marble floors; and the poor were used to them (Bekhor Shor).

NJPS 16And the LORD said to Moses, "Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh, as he is coming out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let My people go that they may worship Me. 17For if you do not let My people go, I will let loose swarms of insects against you and your courtiers and your people and your houses; the houses of the Egyptians, and the very ground they stand on, shall be filled with swarms of insects. 18But on that day I will set apart the region of Goshen,

RASHI 17 I will let loose ... against you. I will incite them, I will sic them on you. **Swarms of insects.** Certainly not just "flies," as OJPS has it. The word implies a mixture of snakes and scorpions and all kinds of evil creatures that would cause devastation among them. There is a certain logic to the midrash in Tanhuma that explains each plague according to the axioms of military strategy for besieging a city. First you destroy the water supply (the plague of blood). Then you barrage them with loud noises in order to frighten them and create confusion. This was achieved by the croaking of the frogs. [O]

18 That you may know that I the LORD am in the midst of the land. Even though My Shekhinah, My Presence, is in heaven, My decree is carried out in the lower worlds.

[O] According to the midrash, the plague of the swarms would be the equivalent of sending in the barbarians. The commentators disagree on why Rashi cites the midrash in connection with this particular plague, yet does not cite the part of the midrash that explains this plague.

NAHMANIDES merely changed the nature of the water; and note that the text does not say that they created frogs, merely that they "brought frogs" (v. 3) that were already in existence. But no one could actually "produce" lice out of dust other than the Blessed Creator. [L] As far as Ibn Ezra's insistence that they did not connect this plague with Israel, it seems obvious to me that Aaron did what he did in Pharaoh's presence, just as Moses later did with the soot (9:10). The difference was that God did not warn Pharaoh in advance about the lice, for He did this only with the plagues that caused death to human beings, as even the frogs (see Ps. 78:45, which our Sages, based on Lev. 22:25, take as referring to castration) and locusts (by creating famine) might have done. For God insists upon warning the wicked when they are in danger; see Ezek. 33:9. Thus He warned Pharaoh about the pestilence, but not about the lice, boils, or darkness—for his intent was to spare him (see 9:16).

16 Early in the morning ... as he is coming out to the water. A comparable phrase is used with several of the plagues. The straightforward explanation is that it was at this time, when kings go down to play in the water, that the Holy One commanded Moses to approach him. With the blood, since it was the first plague, God wanted Moses to do it fearlessly and in Pharaoh's presence. "Station yourself before him" (7:15; OJPS "thou shalt stand before him") implies defiance. Similarly here; OJPS "stand before Pharaoh" is closer to the Hebrew than NJPS "present yourself to Pharaoh." Though 9:15, before the plague of hail, does not say so explicitly, that took place when Pharaoh went out to the water as well. Since the swarms and the hail involved human punishment and death, the Holy One wanted them to take place before the eyes of all. For most of the people would follow the king down to the water. Moses warned him before their eyes, hoping they would plead with their lord to turn back from his evil way. If they did not, they too would have earned their punishment. But with the other plagues merely warning the king was enough: "Go to Pharaoh" (7:26, frogs; 9:1, animal pestilence; 10:1, locusts)—to the palace. This did not occur with the lice and the boils, since Aaron had to be outside to strike the dust (a king's floors are alabaster and marble, not dirt) and Moses had to be outside to throw the soot into the sky. These two were performed in Pharaoh's presence while he was in the palace garden, or somewhere like that.

18 I will set apart the region of Goshen. The original plagues simply stayed where they were, so it was no miracle that they affected Egypt and not Goshen. But this was the kind of plague that spreads. When the lions came out of their dens and the leopards

[L] We omit here a section on the rabbinic discussion of the plagues at B. Sanh. 67b (with an addition from Exodus Rabbah), which Nahmanides uses to prove his point that bringing the frogs was not an activity of creation.

OJPS 16And the LORD said unto Moses: "Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh forth to the water; and say unto him: Thus saith the LORD: Let My people go, that they may serve Me. 17Else, if thou wilt not let My people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies upon thee, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people, and into thy houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground whereon they are. 18And I will set apart in that day the land of Goshen, in which My

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲשֵׁם בִּבְקָר
וְהַתִּיצֵב לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה הֲנֵה יוֹצֵא הַמִּימָה
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח עִמִּי
וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי: 17 כִּי אִם־אֵינְךָ מְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי
הַנֶּנִּי מְשַׁלֵּיחַ בָּךְ וּבַעֲבֹדֶיךָ וּבַעֲמָךְ
וּבְבִתֶּיךָ אֶת־הָעֶרֶב וּמִלֵּאָו בְּתֵי מִצְרַיִם
אֶת־הָעֶרֶב וְגַם הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־הֵם עָלֶיהָ:
וְהַפְלִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן 18

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why is the plague of insects (vv. 16–20), like those of pestilence and the slaying of the first-born, performed without the use of the rod and not by Moses or Aaron? ♦ Why does "I will set apart the region of Goshen" (v. 18) intervene between the plague and the promise "that you may know"? It should really come in the middle of v. 19.

RASHBAM 17 Swarms of insects. I think these "swarms" (*arov*) are really swarms of wolves. Note that "the wolf of the desert" (Jer. 5:6) is *ze'ev aravot*, and the "wolves of the steppe" (Zeph. 3:3) are *z'evai erev*. Grammatically *arov* is the adjectival form of *erev*, "steppe." [H]

18 On that day I will set apart. Since the wild beasts could easily go through the

[H] I have relied on the modern translations of the verses from Jeremiah and Zephaniah. But Rashbam's French gloss shows that he understood the word in all three verses to be derived from the Hebrew homonym of *erev* that means "evening," referring to a swarm of "nocturnal" wolves.

IBN EZRA them (which is why He hardened Pharaoh's heart). Note that they say "the finger of God," not of the Lord. Since this plague was not announced, as those of the pestilence and the frogs were, they did not connect it with Moses or the Lord. Remember that in the plague of frogs, Pharaoh did say to Moses, "Plead with the LORD" (8:4).

16 As he is coming out to the water. It is the custom of kings to go out in the morning to the river, for seeing the water is good for the eyes. [R]

17 Let loose. The same verb as "let go" earlier in the verse, but used in an unusual conjugation. **Swarms of insects.** Ps. 78:45 "to devour them" confirms that the NJPS "insects" is correct; "flies" of OJPS is too specific, since etymologically the word *arov* implies a "mixture" of species. [S] **The very ground.** Even in unsettled areas, where there were no houses.

18 I will set apart the region ... where My people dwell. It was obviously this setting apart that was responsible for Pharaoh's first concession (see 8:21). Once he

[R] Why this is so is unexplained. But notice that Ibn Ezra gives a different explanation here than he did at 7:15. This may mean that he agrees that this plague took place some months later, after the flood season was over. [S] In the long commentary, Ibn Ezra takes the word to imply a diverse group of beasts that could literally eat a human being: lions, wolves, bears, and leopards.

NJPS where My people dwell, so that no swarms of insects shall be there, that you may know that I the LORD am in the midst of the land. ¹⁹And I will make a distinction between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall come to pass.” ²⁰And the LORD did so. Heavy swarms of insects invaded Pharaoh’s palace and the houses of his courtiers; throughout the country of Egypt the land was ruined because of the swarms of insects.

²¹Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go and sacrifice to your God within the land.” ²²But Moses replied, “It would not be right to do this, for what we sacrifice to the LORD our God is

RASHI 19 A distinction. A separation between My people and your people.

21 Within the land. In your own place—not in the wilderness.

22 That which is untouchable to the Egyptians. Literally, with OJPS, “the abomination of the Egyptians.” Following 2 Kings 23:13, this means, “that which the

NAHMANIDES down from their mountains, it would be natural for them to go to Goshen as well, which after all was a region of Egypt. Thus God had to make explicit that all of Goshen would be spared on account of His people, who made up the majority there. **I the LORD am in the midst of the land.** Ibn Ezra likens this to a king in the middle of his kingdom. But this makes no sense. It is to say that He is the ruler and keeps an eye on everything, against the opinion of those who think, “The clouds screen Him so He cannot see as He moves about the circuit of heaven” (Job 22:14). [M] Or “in the midst” may have to do with “I am sending an angel before you ... My Name is in him” (23:20–21)—literally, “in his midst.” This is a lofty and esoteric mystery.

19 I will make a distinction between My people and your people. Even within Egypt, if the animals found a Jew, they would eat the Egyptians but not harm him: “He inflicted upon them swarms of beasts to devour them” (Ps. 78:45). The word used here for “distinction” comes from the root that means “to redeem”; note Isa. 43:3, “I give Egypt as a ransom for you, Ethiopia and Saba in exchange for you.”

[M] Eliphaz puts these words in Job’s mouth to parody Job’s opinion: “What can God know? Can He govern through the dense cloud?” (Job 22:13).

heart, the king of the body, in its center. He also created the human spirit in the center of the body: “the LORD, Who ... created man’s breath in the middle of him” (Zech. 12:1). There are many proofs of this from nature. Moreover, this explains “From Zion, perfect in beauty, God appeared” (Ps. 50:2)—for Zion is in the middle of the inhabited world, and it is in the inhabited world that God’s kingdom appears. [T]

19 I will make a distinction. This too will be a sign within a sign: for the swarms to be able to distinguish between My people and your people. — The “distinction” applies to those of the Israelites who were living among the Egyptians, not those who lived separately in Goshen, which was “set apart” in v. 18.

20 The LORD did so. The next day, as Moses had decreed. **Heavy swarms of insects invaded.** Of their own accord. [U] This plague was more severe than any of the previous ones.

21 Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. By now it was clear to Pharaoh that the plagues were coming because the Israelites had not sacrificed to God. **Within the land.** Within his kingdom, not somewhere else.

22 Untouchable to the Egyptians. OJPS “the abomination of the Egyptians” is closer to the Hebrew. According to Jeshua b. Judah, Moses wrote it this way in the Torah to insult idolatry; to Pharaoh, he said only, “the gods of the Egyptians.” Jeshua adds that their gods were in the form of a ram (because they thought that Aries the ram was the astrological sign that ruled Egypt), and hence they would

[T] Not all over the entire planet, but only where there is human settlement. [U] Ibn Ezra is either explaining why the swarms “invaded” (OJPS “came”) rather than being sent, or the fact that “heavy” swarms came (which Moses did not threaten).

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 19 A distinction between My people and your people. In Goshen, where Egyptians also lived (Gersonides). The etymology of the word, from the verb “redeem,” implies that from this moment the Israelites ceased to serve the Egyptians as slaves (Abarbanel).

21 Within the land. After all, Moses has made a point of telling him (8:18) that God is “in the midst of the land” (Abarbanel).

OJPS people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end that thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. ¹⁹And I will put a division between My people and thy people—by to-morrow shall this sign be.” ²⁰And the LORD

did so; and there came grievous swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants’ houses; and in all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by reason of the swarms of flies.

²¹And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said: “Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.” ²²And Moses said: “It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the

אֲשֶׁר עָמַל עֲמִידָה לְבַלְתִּי הַיּוֹת־שָׁם
עָרַב לְמַעַן תִּדְעַ פִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּקֶרֶב
הָאָרֶץ: 19 וְשִׁמְתִּי פֶדֶת בֵּין עַמִּי וּבֵין עַמֶּךָ
לְמַחֵר יִהְיֶה הָאֵת הַזֶּה: 20 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה
כֵּן וַיָּבֹא עָרֹב כְּבֹד בֵּיתָה פְרִיעָה וּבֵיתָ*
עֲבָדָיו וּבְכָל-אָרֶץ מִצְרַיִם תִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ
מִפְּנֵי הָעָרֹב:

21 וַיִּקְרָא פְרִיעָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְלֵאמֹר וַיֹּאמֶר
לְכוּ וְזָכוּ לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם בְּאָרֶץ: 22 וַיֹּאמֶר
מֹשֶׁה לֹא נָכוֹן לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן בִּי תוֹעֵבָת

20. v. סבירין ומטעין “ובבית”.

ABARBANEL’S QUESTIONS ♦ Why does v. 19 repeat the assertion that the Israelites will not be harmed by the plague? ♦ Why is the timing (“tomorrow,” v. 19) of this plague announced, when it was not for the previous plagues? ♦ Why does the plague of insects, unlike any of the previous plagues, include the phrase “And the LORD did so” (v. 20)? Would one expect God to say something and not do it? ♦ What got into Pharaoh to propose that they sacrifice “within the land” (v. 21)?

RASHBAM whole kingdom once the plague was unleashed, it was more necessary with this plague than the others to emphasize the separation between the Israelites and the Egyptians. The same is true of the pestilence, as noted in 9:4.

19 A distinction. That is, a separation. “Salvation,” “rescue,” “removal,” and “tearing away” are all words that similarly convey a sense of separation and distinction. **Tomorrow this sign shall come to pass.** I am naming the time so that you cannot pass it off as a coincidence.

22 Untouchable to the Egyptians. For sheep were an abomination to the Egyptians. **Will they not stone us!** It should be punctuated with a question mark. The

IBN EZRA saw that God had made a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians, he feared to do them any evil. He realized that he had to let them go and sacrifice, lest he be struck by pestilence. You see that he now gives them permission to sacrifice within the land (v. 21). **I the LORD am in the midst of the land.** The metaphor is that of a king, for the custom of kings is to stay in the middle of their kingdom in order to be equidistant from all points on the borders. Similarly, God created the human

NJPS untouchable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice that which is untouchable to the Egyptians before their very eyes, will they not stone us! ²³So we must go a distance of three days into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He may command us.” ²⁴Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; but do not go very far. Plead, then, for me.” ²⁵And Moses said, “When I leave your presence, I will plead with the LORD that the swarms of insects depart tomorrow from Pharaoh and his courtiers and his people; but let not Pharaoh again act deceitfully, not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

²⁶So Moses left Pharaoh’s presence and pleaded with the LORD. ²⁷And the LORD did as Moses asked: He removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, from his courtiers, and from his people; not one remained. ²⁸But Pharaoh became stubborn this time also, and would not let the people go.

RASHI Egyptians worship”—which the Israelites consider abomination. In other words, the sacrifice we are performing is anathema to the Egyptians, because we are sacrificing what they worship. **Will they not stone us!** It should be punctuated with a question mark, as in OJPS.

26 Pleaded with the LORD. That is, he exerted himself greatly in prayer. The conjugation of the verb here differs from that in v. 25, where it means “to pray a great deal.”

27 He removed the swarms. But they did not die as the frogs did. For had they died the Egyptians would have been able to use their skins. [P]

[P] Rashi pictures them not as insects but as reptiles; see his comment to v. 17.

NAHMANIDES 25 Tomorrow. Just as Pharaoh had asked for the frogs to be removed “tomorrow,” Moses wanted to do the same in this case. But notice that, unlike the frogs, the swarms of animals did not die but were “removed” (v. 27). Our Sages have explained the reason. God wanted everything about the plagues to be harmful and nothing beneficial. [N] Moses was careful to say that the frogs would be “cut off,” but that the swarms would “depart.”

[N] The frogs died in heaps, causing the Egyptians more trouble; but the wild animals’ pelts, and perhaps their meat, would have been valuable had they died where they were.

where meat is eaten, nor will he eat anything that flesh food has touched; they consider vessels that have contained meat unclean. Note Gen. 43:32, “the Egyptians could not dine with the Hebrews, since that would be abhorrent to the Egyptians.” Potiphar, moreover, “left all that he had in Joseph’s hands and ... *paid attention to nothing save the food that he ate*” (Gen. 39:6). He would not let Joseph touch that, because he was a Hebrew. Don’t bother to ask why (if this is true) the Egyptians had cattle, for the Hindus have cattle too—horses, asses, and camels to ride and as beasts of burden; cattle for plowing; and sheep for wool. I will return to this subject in my comment to 12:7. **Will they not stone us!** Japheth b. Ali thinks this phrase should be a question (and that the letter indicating a question was simply left out). But in fact the unusual word used here for “if” (*hen*) is the question word: “Isn’t it so that if we sacrifice ... they will stone us?”

23 A distance of three days. We must go far away from the Egyptians. **As He may command us.** Which animals we must sacrifice, and how many of each.

24 Plead ... for me. “Then” is added by the NJPS; in fact, this phrase ought to have come first in the verse—plead for me that this plague be withdrawn, and then I will let you go to sacrifice in the wilderness as you asked, on condition that you not go farther than three days away.

25 Let not Pharaoh again act deceitfully. Rather, “let Pharaoh not jest again.” Moses said this because Pharaoh had promised to let them go if the frogs were removed, but he didn’t.

28 Pharaoh became stubborn. OJPS is more explicit: “Pharaoh hardened his heart” himself. This makes clear that it was also

OJPS LORD our God; lo, if we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²³We will go three days’ journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as He shall command us.” ²⁴And Pharaoh said: “I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away; entreat for me.” ²⁵And Moses said: “Behold, I go out from thee, and I will entreat the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart from

Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people, tomorrow; only let not Pharaoh deal deceitfully any more in not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

²⁶And Moses went out from Pharaoh, and entreated the LORD. ²⁷And the LORD did according to the word of Moses; and He removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people; there remained not one. ²⁸And Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.

RASHBAM stoning would be a sign of contempt, as happened to David on his way out of Jerusalem after Absalom seized power: “Shimei walked alongside on the slope of the hill, insulting him as he walked, and throwing stones at him and flinging dirt” (2 Sam. 16:13).

28 Pharaoh became stubborn this time also. As with the plague of frogs, he

IBN EZRA not eat meat. But why would this prevent them from eating the meat of an ox or a kid? In my opinion, the Egyptians of Moses’ time shared the opinion of the people of India—who, like the Egyptians, are Hamites to a man, and who make up more than half the population of the world—who do not eat meat to this day. Nor do they eat blood, milk, fish, or eggs—in short, anything that comes from an animal. And they are disgusted by anyone who does. Shepherding is a despised profession among them. Note Gen. 46:34: “All shepherds are abhorrent to Egyptians.” To this day, they will not let anyone eat meat in their land. If one of them goes to a foreign country, he flees any place

מִצְרַיִם נִזְבַּח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֵן נִזְבַּח
אֶת־תּוֹעֵבַת מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְלֹא
יִסְקְלֵנוּ: ²³ דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים נֵלֶךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר
וְנִזְבַּחַנו לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר
אֱלֹהֵינוּ: ²⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר פְּרָעָה אֲנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח
אֶתְכֶם וְנִזְבַּחְתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר
כִּי הִרְחַק לֹא־תִרְחִיקוּ לָלֶכֶת הָעִתִּירוּ
בַּעֲדִי: ²⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי יוֹצֵא
מֵעַמְּךָ וְהָעִתִּירְתִּי אֶל־יְהוָה וְסָר הָעֶרֶב
מִפְּרָעָה מֵעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמֵעַמְּךָ מִחֵר רַק אֶל־יִסָּף
פְּרָעָה הַחַל לְבַלְתִּי שַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעָם לִזְבֹּחַ
לַיהוָה:

²⁶ וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה מֵעַם פְּרָעָה וַיַּעֲתֹר אֶל־
יְהוָה: ²⁷ וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה כְּדִבְרֵי מֹשֶׁה וַיִּסָּר
הָעֶרֶב מִפְּרָעָה מֵעַבְדֶּיךָ וּמֵעַמְּךָ לֹא נִשְׁאַר
אֶחָד: ²⁸ וַיִּכְבַּד פְּרָעָה אֶת־לְבָבוֹ גַּם בַּפֶּעַם
הַזֹּאת וְלֹא שַׁלַּח אֶת־הָעָם: פ

ABARBANEL’S QUESTIONS ♦ Once Moses made clear that they had to go three days’ journey into the wilderness, why would Pharaoh tell them, “Do not go very far” (v. 24)? Such a large group could not travel far in three days.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 28 Would not let the people go. It was a great reproach to the kingdom for the king not to do as he had promised (Gersonides).