

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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²God spoke to Moses and said to him, “I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה: ³וָאֵרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק
וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שְׁדַי וְשָׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא

DIVINE REAFFIRMATION (6:2–7:13)

Moses and the Israelites are demoralized because their situation has deteriorated sharply. God reappears to Moses and reveals the essential nature of the divine name and its relation to the promises made to the patriarchs.

3. I did not make Myself known An enigmatic phrase. It cannot mean that a previously unknown divine name—*YHVH*—is about to be revealed for the first time. A divine promise is of little credibility if it is made by an unknown deity.

In this *parashah*, Pharaoh continues his refusal to grant the Israelites their freedom. God threatens to continue to harden Pharaoh's heart, so that only after several terrible plagues will he relent. Moses and Aaron do not succeed in impressing Pharaoh and his court magicians with their wonders. The first 7 of the Ten Plagues are called down on the Egyptians. The confrontation between Moses and Aaron on the one hand and Pharaoh on the other, between God's emissaries and those who defy God, becomes sharper. Even Pharaoh's new order that the slaves gather their own straw for making bricks fits this process of escalation. The situation for both the Egyptians and the Israelites must become unbearable to overcome the tendency of both sides to maintain the status quo.

Why is it necessary to prolong the process of liberation? It is not enough that the Israelites be freed. That might mistakenly be seen as an act of magnanimity on Pharaoh's part. They must be freed in such a way that they, the Egyptians, and all the nations of the world will understand that it was God's doing, not Pharaoh's goodwill. (This is important, not so much to burnish God's reputation but to establish the principle that it is unacceptable for one human being to reduce another human being to slavery, that freedom is the will of God and not the choice of a despot.)

CHAPTER 6

2. I am the LORD According to the Midrash, God has two attributes: justice (represented by the divine name *Elohim*, translated “God”) and mercy (represented by the divine name *YHVH*, translated “the LORD”). This verse would seem to represent a conflict within God, in which the attribute of justice would chastise Moses for seeming to lose faith (5:22:

“why did You bring harm upon this people?” Why have You waited while so many have suffered and died? When the Redemption occurs, it will be too late for them!). *Elohim*, the divine attribute of justice, wants to strike at Moses for speaking thus, but the attribute of mercy speaks out (“I am *YHVH*”) and saves him, realizing that he was speaking in that tone on behalf of people who have suffered so much for so long (Exod. R. 6:1). This is the last time that the divine name *Elohim*/justice appears in any speech of God to Moses. Henceforth it will always be *YHVH*/mercy.

A modern midrashic interpretation: Why did God speak to Moses exclusively in the name of the attribute of mercy from this moment on? Hearing Moses' concern for those who would not live to see the liberation from slavery, God declared: “I cannot judge this man! He is as righteous a judge as I! Therefore I will speak to him only with the voice of Mercy, for the burden of caring for the Israelites is so great, and only Moses is merciful enough to do it.” Another modern midrashic interpretation: “To the patriarchs, I revealed Myself as a nurturing, mothering God. [Some suggest that *Shaddai* may be related to the word *shadayim*, “breasts.”] My relationship to them was that of a parent to a child, encouraging and forgiving, making few demands. But with this man Moses, I will speak face to face, as one adult to another. I will reveal to him My personal, intimate name, *YHVH*. Moreover, because Moses defends the cause of the Israelites so passionately, I will show this side of My nature to them as well: ‘And you shall know that I, *YHVH*, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians’ (6:7).” “God of your fathers” is the God of Genesis; *YHVH* is the God of Exodus (B. Jacob).

known to them by My name יהוה.⁴ I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners.⁵ I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant.⁶ Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their

נודעתי להם: ⁴ וגם הקמתי את-בריתי אתם לתת להם את-ארץ כנען את ארץ מגריהם אשר-גרו בה: ⁵ וגם | אני שמעתי את-נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים מעבדים אתם ואזכר את-בריתי: ⁶ לכן אמר לבני-ישראל אני יהוה והוצאתי אתכם ממצרים ממצרים ממצרים ממצרים ממצרים

Nor would an unknown divine name serve to counteract the widespread demoralization of the Israelites. Furthermore, the phrase “I am *YHVH*” in verse 2 appears often in the Bible. It is similar to a form widespread in ancient Semitic royal inscriptions as a self-identification presentation formula, such as “I am Shalmaneser,” “I am Mesha,” or “I am Esarhaddon.” It is not likely, therefore, that it is being used here to introduce a new name. On the contrary, it is precisely because the bearer of the name is well known and its mention evokes awe, reverence, honor, and fear, that its use as the source of a law or an edict encourages obedience.

What, then, does the phrase “I did not make Myself known” mean? In the ancient Near Eastern world names in general, and the name of a god in particular, possessed a dynamic quality and served to express character, attributes, and power. The names of gods were identified with their na-

ture, status, and function. Thus to say, “I did not make Myself known to them by My name *YHVH*,” is to state that the patriarchs did not experience the specific power that is associated with the name *YHVH*. That power—to be displayed in the coming process of redemption—belongs to the future. The repetition here of the promises made by El Shaddai to the patriarchs and now uttered in the name of *YHVH* means that their fulfillment is imminent.

El Shaddai The reference is to Gen. 17:1–8, 35:11–12. With the advent of Moses, the name El Shaddai becomes obsolete, preserved only in poetic texts.

4. to give them The patriarchs received ownership of the land; their descendants would receive possession of it.

5. My covenant With the patriarchs.

6. free you Literally, “bring you out.”

6–8. I will free you . . . and deliver you. . . I will redeem you. . . I will take you. . . I will bring you into the land The stages of Redemption: “I will free you” from physical enslavement in Egypt; I will “deliver you” from the psychological mind-set of being a slave, which might persist even after you have been physically liberated; “I will redeem you” so that you will think of yourselves as free people; and “I will take you” into a special relationship with Me, for that is the ultimate goal of your liberation. Finally, “I will bring you into the land which I swore to give Abraham.” Only when the Israelites have their own land can they become the special people they are summoned to be. Only there will they have the

duty and the opportunity to translate the ideals of the Torah into the realities of daily life and fashion the model society from which all nations will be able to learn. The promise of a land of their own is the Torah’s ultimate promise; the threat of being cast out of that land is its ultimate punishment. It is not enough to remove the burden of slavery; they must also have the proper circumstances that will permit them to flourish as God’s people.

labors of the Egyptians A Hasidic interpretation understands the Hebrew for “burdens” (*sivlot*) as “tolerance.” What was the worst part of slavery? The Israelites became accustomed to it. They lost sight of the fact that one does not have to live in such conditions.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

6:6–8. I will free you . . . and deliver you. . . I will redeem you. . . I will take you to be My people These four phrases of redemption are one source for the four cups of wine that we use at the *Pesah Seider* (JT Pes. 10:1). A fifth phrase in these verses—“I will bring you into the land”—is the basis for having on the *Seider* table a fifth cup reserved for Elijah, the prophet. See Mal. 3:23, part of the *haftarah* for *Shabbat ha-Gadol* preceding *Pesah*.

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 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, “The Israelites would not listen to me; how then should Phar-

redeem you The Hebrew stem here is גאל. In time, the abstract noun *g'ulah* (redemption) acquired messianic associations referring to God's ultimate redemption of Israel from exile.

outstretched arm A symbol of strength and power, the arm generally is understood as a metaphor in descriptions of God's mighty deeds related to the Exodus.

7. This declaration alludes to the covenant that is to be established at Sinai. The phraseology—“to take” and “to be [someone's]”—serves here as a covenantal adoption metaphor.

you shall know That is, “acknowledge.” See Comment to 1:8.

8. I swore Literally, “I raised my hand.” The

והצִלֹתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדְתֶם וְגַאֲלֹתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבִשְׁפָטִים גְּדֹלִים: ⁷ וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וַיִּדְעֶתֶם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם: ⁸ וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יְדֵי לְתַת אֶתְּהָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב וְנִתַּתִּי אֶתְּהָ לָכֶם מוֹרֶשֶׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה: ⁹ וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֵּן אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: פ

¹⁰ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ¹¹ בֹּא דַבֵּר אֶל-פְּרַעֲזָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: ¹² וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה לַפְּנֵי יְהוָה לֵאמֹר הֵן בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ

phrase derives from the symbolic act that accompanies oath taking. The Bible repeatedly asserts that the land of Israel was pledged on oath by God to the patriarchs and their descendants.

MOSES TRANSMITS THE DIVINE MESSAGE (v. 9)

9. they would not listen Moses' message did not succeed in strengthening their morale, in contrast to the experience recorded in 4:31.

their spirits crushed by cruel bondage Literally, “from shortness of spirit.” The word for “spirit” (*ru-ah*) here indicates the spiritual and psychic energy that motivates action. Its absence or diminishment indicates loss of will.

A first step toward liberation will be freeing themselves from their passivity and their tolerance of the intolerable (Menaḥem Mendel of Kotzk).

9. they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage The last phrase can also mean “because of impatience and hard work.” Was it because slavery was so hard and exhausting and left them weary, unable even to envision the possibility of change? The Hebrew translated as “their spirits crushed” (*kotzer ru-ah*) can literally mean “their spirits were stunted.” Or was it because they sensed that freedom would require hard work—that it

would not happen quickly or easily? Or perhaps they would not listen to Moses because he came from Midian and had not shared their labors and suffering. The gap between Moses and his people was great. They were slaves, whereas he had grown up in the palace and had lived in the freedom of Midian. It may be that only one whose spirit had not been crushed by slavery could be capable of leading the people to freedom. The generation that grew up in slavery ultimately would be unable to take advantage of their freedom, and it would perish in the wilderness. Only their children would inherit the Promised Land.

aoh heed me, a man of impeded speech!”¹³ So 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; 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.

A RENEWED CALL TO ACTION (vv. 10–13)

12. *impeded speech* Literally, “uncircumcised of lips,” a synonym for “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (4:10). “Uncircumcised” is also used metaphorically of the heart and the ear. The organ involved is, so to speak, obstructed by a “fore-skin” that prevents it from functioning properly.

13. Ignoring Moses’ objections, God orders him and his brother to resume their mission to both the Israelites and Pharaoh. Aaron is mentioned here for two reasons. First, he is to act as spokesman and thereby offset Moses’ disability; second, he is the focus of the following genealogy. His name thus serves to bridge the transition to the next section.

A GENEALOGY (vv. 14–25)

The insertion of a genealogy at this point is a literary device that separates the first stage in the process of liberation—futile human efforts—from the awesome intervention of God that will

אֵלַי וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמַעֲנִי פְרַעֲהַּ וְאֲנִי עֵרְלָה
שְׂפָתַיִם: פ¹³ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה
וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּצִיחֵם אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל-
פְּרַעֲהַּ מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת-בְּנֵי-
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: ס

שְׁנֵי¹⁴ אֵלֶּה רָאשֵׁי בֵית-אֲבֹתָם
בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲנוּךְ וּפְלוּא
חֲצִרֹן וְכַרְמֵי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת רְאוּבֵן:
וּבְנֵי שִׁמְעוֹן יְמוּאֵל וַיְמִין וְאַהֲדָה וַיְכִין¹⁵
וְצַחַר וְשָׂאוּל בְּן-הַכְּנַעֲנִית אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת
שִׁמְעוֹן: וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי-לֵוִי לְתֹלְדֹתָם
גֶרְשׁוֹן וְקַהַת וּמְרָרִי וְשֹׁנִי חַיִּי לֵוִי שֶׁבַע¹⁶

now ensue: the Ten Plagues. At the same time, it links the period of the Exodus with that of the patriarchs. (Note that it presents only four generations between Levi and Moses, in keeping with Gen. 15:16.) A genealogy symbolizes vigor and continuity. Its inclusion here injects a reassuring note into the prevailing mood of despair. The genealogy singles out the Levites from among the tribes of Israel and distinguishes the family of Aaron from among the levitical families. This anticipates later developments: the special status granted to the tribe of Levi, the appointment of the Aaronides to serve as priests, and the appointment of Aaron as high priest.

15. a Canaanite woman This exceptional notice most likely reflects the unfavorable view of intermarriage with Canaanites.

16. These three are the heads of levitical clans that later performed necessary menial duties in connection with the wilderness tabernacle. The names of the members of their families and the services assigned to them are listed in detail in Num. 3:17–39.

12. *The Israelites would not listen to me* Leaders derive their power and legitimacy from the willingness of people to listen to them.

14. Why does this genealogical list interrupt the narrative at this point? Perhaps to emphasize that Moses, despite having grown up in the palace, is of Israelite descent. Perhaps to

connect the Israelite clans in Egypt (*beit avot*) with God’s promise to the *avot*, the patriarchs, referred to in verses 3 and 8. Moses and Aaron may have questioned their own worthiness. This list would remind them that they confront Pharaoh not as two anonymous individuals but as the latest representatives of an illustrious ancestry.

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.

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

וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה: ¹⁷ בְּנֵי גֵרְשׁוֹן לְבִנָּי וּשְׁמֵעִי לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם: ¹⁸ וּבְנֵי קֹהַת עַמְרָם וַיִּצְהָר וְחֶבְרוֹן וְעֻזִּיאֵל וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי קֹהַת שְׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה: ¹⁹ וּבְנֵי מֵרָרִי מַחְלִי וּמוּשִׁי אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת הַלְוִי לְתֹלְדוֹתָם:

²⁰ וַיִּקַּח עַמְרָם אֶת־יְוֹכָבֵד דִּדְתוֹ לֹו לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לֹו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־מֹשֶׁה וּשְׁנֵי חַיֵּי עַמְרָם שִׁבְעַ וּשְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה: ²¹ וּבְנֵי יִצְהָר קֹרַח וְנַפְגַּ וְזִיכְרִי: ²² וּבְנֵי עֻזִּיאֵל מִיִּשְׁאֵל וְאֶלְצָפָן וְסִיתְרִי: ²³ וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן אֶת־אֵלִישֶׁבַע בַּת־עַמִּינָדָב אַחֹת נַחֲשׁוֹן לֹו לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לֹו אֶת־נָדָב וְאֶת־אֲבִיהוּא אֶת־אֶלְעָזָר וְאֶת־אִיתְמָר: ²⁴ וּבְנֵי קֹרַח אֲסִיר וְאֶלְקָנָה וְאַבִּיאֶסָף אֵלֶּה מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּרָחִי: ²⁵ וְאֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן לָקַח־לֹו מִבְּנוֹת פּוּטִיאֵל לֹו לְאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד לֹו אֶת־פִּינְחָס אֵלֶּה רֵאשֵׁי אֲבוֹת הַלְוִיִּם לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם:

²⁶ הוּא אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה לָהֶם הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ

20. his father's sister Marriage to a paternal aunt is prohibited in the legislation of Lev. 18:12 and 20:19. Therefore, this notice must preserve a very ancient tradition.

Jochebed She is the anonymous "Levite woman" of Exod. 2:1 and the first biblical personage clearly to bear a name including *yo*, the shortened form of the divine name *YHVH*. Her name seems to mean "YHVH is glory."

24. The Korahite clan later became a guild of Temple singers to whom several psalms are attributed (e.g., Ps. 42,45–49,84–85,87–88). They are also listed as "guards of the threshold of the Tent" (1 Chron. 9:19) who performed tasks such as baking and gate keeping. An 8th-century bowl inscribed with the words "the sons of Korah" (*bnv krh*) has been found in an Israelite shrine at Arad in the Negev.

25. Putiel's The text assumes that he was well known although he is not mentioned elsewhere. The name is a hybrid of Egyptian (*Puti*)

and Hebrew (*el*), and means "the one whom God has given."

Phinehas This name is also Egyptian and means "the Nubian/dark-skinned one." It was fairly common in Egypt in the 13th century B.C.E. Other levitical figures also have Egyptian names, such as Hor, Merari, and Hophni, offering evidence to the historicity of the Exodus of the ancestors of that tribe from Egypt.

A RECAPITULATION (vv. 26–30)

Following the digression of the genealogy, this brief section summarizes and repeats verses 10–13. It also reconnects the genealogy with the account of the Exodus.

26. It is the same That is, the same Aaron and Moses mentioned in the genealogy.

troop by troop The narratives employ military terminology for the organization of the Israelites during the Exodus and the wilderness wanderings.

who spoke to Pharaoh 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!”

מִצְרַיִם עַל-צַבְאֹתָם: ²⁷ הֵם הַמְדַבְּרִים
 אֶל-פְּרַעֲה מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת-
 בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:
²⁸ וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּאָרֶץ
 מִצְרַיִם: ^פ ²⁹ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה
 לֵאמֹר אֲנִי יְהוָה דִּבַּר אֶל-פְּרַעֲה מֶלֶךְ
 מִצְרַיִם אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ:
³⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה הֵן אֲנִי עֵרֶל
 שִׁפְתַּיִם וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמַע אֵלַי פְּרַעֲה: ^פ

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 speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ
 אֱלֹהִים לְפְרַעֲה וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ יִהְיֶה
 נְבִיאֶךָ: ² אֵתָּה תְדַבֵּר אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ
 וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ יְדַבֵּר אֶל-פְּרַעֲה וְשַׁלַּח

REAFFIRMATION AND RENEWAL OF
 MOSES' MISSION (7:1-7)

1. your prophet Your spokesman. The Hebrew word *navi* may well be derived from an Ak-

kadian verb meaning “to call, proclaim”—the divine word, that is. Moses will thus expose the holiness of Pharaoh’s claim to divinity.

2. Moses and Aaron speak not on their own initiative but as agents of God’s will.

CHAPTER 7

3. I will harden Pharaoh’s heart The verse raises major moral and theological problems. If Pharaoh is foreordained to reject Moses’ plea, if God will arrange for the confrontation to continue, how can Pharaoh be held responsible for his actions and how can we justify his being punished for what God causes him to do? “Although ‘hardening of the heart’ seems deterministic, events flow naturally from the ambitions and conflicts of a human being, Pharaoh, who is seized with the delusion of self-sufficiency. While events unfold under the providence of God, their unfolding is always according to the motives of the human beings through whom God’s will is done without their realizing it. . . . Pharaoh conducted himself in conformity with his own motives and his own Godless view of his status. God made it so, but Pharaoh had only to be himself to do God’s will” (Moshe Greenberg).

We note that for the first five plagues, the text reads: “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.” That is, he himself chose to be stubborn. Only for the last five plagues do we read “God har-

dened Pharaoh’s heart.” In the beginning of the process, Pharaoh was equally free to be generous or to be stubborn. Every time he chose the option of stubbornness, however, he gave away some of his free will. Each choice made it more likely that he would choose similarly the next time, both to spare himself the embarrassment of admitting that he was wrong and because he now had the self-image of a person who would not yield to Moses’ pleading. “At first, it was you who hardened your heart. Henceforth I shall contribute to the hardening.”

Similarly, Maimonides writes: “Sometimes a man’s offense is so grave that he forecloses the possibility of repentance. At first [Pharaoh] sinned repeatedly of his own free will, until he forfeited the capacity to repent.” Erich Fromm has written, “Pharaoh’s heart hardens because he keeps on doing evil. It hardens to a point where no more change or repentance is possible. . . . The longer he refuses to choose the right, the harder his heart becomes . . . until there is no longer any freedom of choice left him.” God has structured the human heart in such a way that Pharaoh prevents himself from changing.

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 over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst." ⁶This 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 be-

את־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: ³ וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה
את־לֵב פְּרַעֲה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־אֹתוֹתַי וְאֶת־
מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴ וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַע
אֲלֵכֶם פְּרַעֲה וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־יָדִי בַּמִּצְרַיִם
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צְבָאוֹתַי אֶת־עַמִּי בְנֵי־
יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשַׁפְּטִים גְּדֹלִים:
⁵ וְיִדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּנֹתְתִי אֶת־
יָדִי עַל־מִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִתּוֹכָם: ⁶ וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
יְהוָה אֹתָם בְּן עָשׂוּ: ⁷ וּמֹשֶׁה בֶן־שְׁמֹנִים
שָׁנָה וְאַהֲרֹן בֶּן־שְׁלֹשׁ וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה
בַּדְּבָרָם אֶל־פְּרַעֲה: פ

רביעי ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן
לֵאמֹר: ⁹ כִּי יִדְבֹר אֲלֵיכֶם פְּרַעֲה לֵאמֹר
תְּנוּ לָכֶם מוֹפֵת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח
אֶת־מִטְּךָ וְהִשְׁלַךְ לִפְנֵי־פְרַעֲה יְהִי לְתַנִּין:

3-4. These verses, which allude to the forthcoming plagues, are also God's response to Moses' protestations in 6:30, as though to say, "Of course Pharaoh will not be easily swayed, but not on account of your inadequacy. Rather, it is because I use his stubbornness to demonstrate My active Presence."

harden Pharaoh's heart See Comment to 4:21.

5. the Egyptians shall know This is the ultimate response to Pharaoh's contemptuous declaration, "I do not know the LORD." In time, as a result of these events, the entire world will come to "know the LORD."

7. eighty years old Moses commences his public leadership career at an age that in biblical

times was seen as the completion of unusual longevity (see Ps. 90:10).

SIGNS BEFORE PHARAOH (vv. 8-13)

Moses, to authenticate his claim as a divinely appointed emissary to Israel, had performed his signs before the people. Now he must do the same before Pharaoh.

9. say to Aaron Henceforth, Aaron will perform the signs when the Egyptian magicians are present. This enables Moses to negotiate with Pharaoh as an equal and not be equated with the magicians.

a serpent In 4:3 the word for "serpent" is *nahash*. Here it is *tannin*, a more general term for a large reptile. *Tannin* may have special relevance

7. Moses was eighty years old In Gen. 47:7-10, a previous Pharaoh was impressed by Jacob's advanced age. Moses and Aaron may have thought, "If Pharaoh doesn't respect our message, perhaps he will respect our advanced years." The reference to Moses' age might remind us of the potential contribution of the elderly to our society, the sharing of their wisdom and experience, and their ability to take on new challenges and responsibilities.

8. The confrontation here is not only between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians but also

between miracles and magic. In magic, humans try to impose their will on God. Miracles demonstrate God's greatness beyond the limits of human power. Magic originates in the will of a human being to impress or fool other human beings. Miracles, although they may use a human instrument, are part of a larger divine design. A Hasidic comment takes the words "produce your marvel" (v. 9) to mean "produce a marvel that will astonish you as well." A magic trick astonishes the audience; a miracle astonishes even those who perform it with God's help.

fore 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 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

וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן
כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁלֹף אֶהָרֹן אֶת־מִטְּהוֹ
לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וּלְפָנָי עֲבָדָיו וַיְהִי לְתַנִּין׃
¹¹ וַיִּקְרָא גַם־פַּרְעֹה לַחֲכָמִים וּלְמַכְשָׁפִים
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם־הֵם חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלַהֲטֵיהֶם
כֵּן׃ ¹² וַיִּשְׁלִיכוּ אִישׁ מִטְּהוֹ וַיְהִיו לְתַנִּינִם
וַיִּבְלַע מִטְּהַ־אֶהָרֹן אֶת־מִטְּתָם׃ ¹³ וַיַּחֲזֹק
לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
יְהוָה׃ פ
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כְּבֹד לֵב פַּרְעֹה

regarding Pharaoh, who is addressed as follows in Ezek. 29:3: "Thus says the Lord GOD: / I am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh, king of Egypt, / Mighty monster [*ba-tannin ha-gadol*]."

11. magicians Hebrew *hartumim* derives from an Egyptian term meaning "chief lector [reader] priest," a title bestowed on a learned scribe and priest whose skills included expertise in magic and dream interpretation.

with their spells The use of "spells" contrasts sharply with the simplicity of Aaron's act, which is unaccompanied by any incantation or unusual behavior. Such spells probably belonged to the magicians' repertoire of tricks.

12–13. After casting his rod down, Aaron does nothing further. The rod—a real one—appears to act on its own. Nevertheless, Pharaoh remains unmoved.

THE PLAGUES (7:14–11:10)

As foretold, Pharaoh's stubbornness sets in motion the "extraordinary chastisements" mentioned in verse 4. A total of 10 disasters—popularly known as the "Ten Plagues" (*Eser Makkot*)—strike Egypt in the course of a year.

There are three accounts of the plagues in the Hebrew Bible. The longest and most detailed is the version set forth in these chapters. Psalms 78:43–51 and 105:27–36 are shorter, poetic presentations. The narrative here is a sophisticated literary structure, with a pattern of three groups, each made up of 3 plagues. The climactic 10th plague has a character all its own. The first 2 afflictions in each group are preceded by a warning; the last affliction always strikes suddenly, unannounced. For the 1st, 4th, and 7th plagues, Pharaoh is informed in the morning and Moses is told to "station" himself before the king; in the second of each series, Moses is told to "come in before Pharaoh," that is, to confront him in the palace. In the first group of plagues, it is Aaron who is the effective agent; in the third, it is Moses. This symmetrical literary architecture emphasizes the idea that the 9 plagues are not random natural disasters, but deliberate acts of divine will—their purpose being to deliver retribution, to coerce, to educate. They are God's judgments on Egypt for

the enslavement of the Israelites. They are meant to crush Pharaoh's resistance and demonstrate to Egypt the impotence of its gods and the uniqueness of *YHVH*, God of Israel, as the one supreme sovereign God of Creation, who uses the natural order for His own purposes.

FIRST PLAGUE: BLOODY WATERS (*dam*) (7:14–25)

The Nile is the most important natural feature in Egypt. In fact, it is Egypt's "life blood." How fitting, then, that it should be struck first by God to "make it bleed" from a mortal wound. This plague has been explained as the intensification of a phenomenon that occurs periodically in the Nile valley. The river is fed by melting snow and summer rains that pour down from the highlands of Ethiopia and carry with them sediment from the tropical red earth of that region. An abnormally heavy rainfall would lead to an excessively high rise of the Nile and wash down into it inordinate amounts of the red sediment. Thus the river, unable to absorb this substance as it would during a gradual rise of its waters, takes on a bloody hue. As a result, bacteria washed down from the high mountain lakes, together with the particles of red earth, disturb the river's oxygen

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 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.”

balance and begin to kill off the fish, producing a horrendous stench.

The Nile flooding, which crests in September or October, has a bearing on the next plague as well. The Egyptians personified and deified the Nile as the crocodile god Sobek, to whom offerings were made at the time of inundation. The flooding itself was regarded as a manifestation of the god Osiris. It is quite possible, then, that the contamination of the river served to discredit Egyptian polytheism. By beginning the series of plagues with the striking of the Nile, the text suggests an underlying notion of divine retribution for Pharaoh’s decree that all newborn males be cast into the river. Although any one of the plagues can be explained naturally, their occurrence here is by divine intervention.

16. Let My people go that they may worship Me The popular phrase is “Let My people go,” but the Bible never uses that phrase without adding the reason and purpose for the Israelites’ freedom. Freedom was more than release from bondage; it provided the opportunity to serve God. It was not only freedom from something; it was freedom for something.

The plagues emphasize that God is the God

מֵאֵן לְשַׁלַּח הָעָם: ¹⁵ לֵךְ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה בַבֹּקֶר הַיּוֹם יֵצֵא הַמִּיִּמָּה וּנְצַבְתָּ לְקִרְאָתוֹ עַל־שַׁפַּת הַיָּאֵר וְהִמַּטָּה אֲשֶׁר־נִהְפָּךְ לְנֹחַשׁ תִּקַּח בְּיָדְךָ: ¹⁶ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהִנֵּה לֹא־שָׁמַעְתָּ עַד־כֹּה: ¹⁷ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה בְּזֹאת תֵּדַע כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲנֹכִי מִכָּה | בַּמַּטֵּה אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדִי עַל־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר וְנִהְפְּכוּ לְדָם: ¹⁸ וְהָדָגָה אֲשֶׁר־בַּיָּאֵר תָּמוּת וּבְאֵשׁ הַיָּאֵר וְנִלְאוּ מִצְרַיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִן־הַיָּאֵר: ט

¹⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן קַח מַטֵּיךָ וּנְטֵה־יָדְךָ עַל־מִיַּמֵּי מִצְרַיִם עַל־נְהַרְתָּם | עַל־יְאֻרֵיהֶם וְעַל־אֲגַמִּיּוֹתָם וְעַל כָּל־מִקְוֵה מִימֵיהֶם וַיְהִי־דָם וְהָיָה דָם בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּבְעֵצִים וּבְאֲבָנִים:

15. as he is coming out to the water The significance of Pharaoh’s act is unexplained. It may involve a ceremony associated with his morning rituals or with worship of the god of the Nile during the inundation period. It is also possible that he may have gone out to measure the height of the river.

17. by this you shall know It is only by experiencing God’s might that Pharaoh will be persuaded to let Israel go.

18. The Nile and its pools teemed with fish, an important element of the popular daily diet. The rotting of the fish, therefore, was a calamitous blow.

19. in vessels of wood and stone “Vessels” is not in the Hebrew text, but the phrase is so understood by medieval Jewish commentators.

of all Creation. Water, weather, animals, and insects all bend to God’s will. The Exodus narrative asserts that the God of Creation is also the God of history. The *Kiddush* recited on *Shabbat* describes *Shabbat* as a reminder both of the world’s creation (God as Lord of nature) and of the Exodus (God as manifest in history).

19. Why was the first plague directed at the Nile? The Nile was the mainstay of Egyptian

²⁰Moses and 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.

²⁵When seven days had passed after the LORD struck the Nile, ²⁶the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: Let My people go that they may worship Me. ²⁷If you refuse to let them go, then I will plague your whole country with frogs. ²⁸The 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. ²⁹The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your courtiers.’”

²⁰וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר | צִוָּה יְהוָה וַיִּרָם בַּמַּטֵּה וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְעֵינֵי פֶרְעֹה וּלְעֵינֵי עֲבָדָיו וַיִּהְיֶה כָּל־הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר־בַּיָּאֵר לְדָם׃ ²¹וַהֲדָגָה אֲשֶׁר־בַּיָּאֵר מֵתָה וַיִּבָּאֵשׁ הַיָּאֵר וְלֹא־יָכֻלוּ מִצְרַיִם לִשְׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִן־הַיָּאֵר וַיְהִי הַדָּם בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם׃ ²²וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן חֲרֻטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִטְיֵיהֶם וַיַּחֲזֹק לִב־פֶּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה׃ ²³וַיִּפֶן פֶּרְעֹה וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא־שָׁת לִבּוֹ גַם־לְזֹאת׃ ²⁴וַיַּחְפְּרוּ כָּל־מִצְרַיִם סְבִיבֹת הַיָּאֵר מַיִם לִשְׁתּוֹת כִּי לֹא יָכֻלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת מִמֵּי־הַיָּאֵר׃

²⁵וַיִּמְלֵא שִׁבְעַת יָמִים אַחֲרֵי הַכּוֹת־יְהוָה אֶת־הַיָּאֵר׃ פ ²⁶וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל־פֶּרְעֹה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי׃ ²⁷וְאִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח הַנֶּה אֲנֹכִי נֹגֵף אֶת־כָּל־גְּבוּלְךָ בַּצְּפַרְדֵּיִם׃ ²⁸וְשַׂרְץ הַיָּאֵר צְפַרְדֵּיִם וְעָלוּ וַבָּאוּ בְּבֵיתְךָ וּבַחֲדָר מִשְׁכַּבְּךָ וְעַל־מִטְתְּךָ וּבַבַּיִת עַבְדֶּיךָ וּבַעֲמֻמָּךְ וּבַתְּנוּרֶיךָ וּבַמִּשְׁאֲרוֹתֶיךָ׃ ²⁹וּבַכְּהָן * וּבַעֲמֻמָּךְ וּבְכָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ יַעֲלוּ הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם׃

v. 29. יתיר ה'

22. The magicians' success offsets the ominous effect of the plague.

SECOND PLAGUE: FROGS (*tz'fardei-a*)
(7:26–8:11)

Frogs, during their reproductive period, normally concentrate in ponds and lakes, and as the Nile begins to recede in September and October, they

usually mass on land. Because their habitat was now polluted by putrefying fish, they were forced onto the land much earlier than usual. But the dead fish were a source of insect-borne infection, which killed off the frogs en masse. This plague, like the first one, may have been regarded as a judgment on the many gods of Egypt, for a frog-headed goddess named Hepat was the consort of the god

life. It provided water for drinking and irrigation; its periodic floods enriched the soil. In the *haftarah*, the prophet Ezekiel pictures Pharaoh saying, “The Nile is mine, I made it for myself.” It also was the site of the Egyptians' great crime of slaying the Hebrew male children. One can speculate on the psychological effect on the

Egyptians, who saw their source of life (that they had made an instrument of death for Israelite babies) turned into a river of blood. Why is Aaron the one to call down the plague on the Nile, not Moses? Because the Nile protected Moses when he was an infant, it would have been ungrateful on his part to afflict it (MRE).

8 And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Hold out your arm with the rod over the rivers, the canals, and the ponds, and bring up the frogs on the land of Egypt.”² Aaron held out his arm over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.³ But 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.”⁵ And 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,” he replied. And [Moses] said, “As you say—that you may know that there is none like the LORD our God;⁷ the frogs shall retreat from you and your courtiers and your people; they shall remain only in the Nile.”⁸ Then 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.⁹ And the LORD did as Moses asked; the frogs died out in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.¹⁰ And they piled them up in heaps, till the land stank.¹¹ But when

ח וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל־אֶהָרֹן נִטְהַר אֶת־יָדְךָ בַּמֶּטֶף עַל־הַנְּהָרוֹת עַל־הַיַּאֲרוֹיִם וְעַל־הָאֲגָמִיִּם וְהָעֵל אֶת־הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ² וַיִּט אֶהָרֹן אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל מִימֵי מִצְרַיִם וַתֵּעַל הַצְּפַרְדֵּעַ וַתִּכַּס אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ³ וַיַּעַשׂוּ־כֵן הַחֲרֻטְמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם וַיַּעֲלוּ אֶת־הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴ וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר הֲעֲתִירוּ אֵל־יְהוָה וַיִּסַּר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּנִּי וּמִעַמִּי וּאֲשַׁלְּחָה אֶת־הָעָם וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לַיהוָה: ⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפַרְעֹה הֲתַפְאֵר עָלַי לְמַתִּי | אֶעֱתִיר לָךְ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וְלַעֲמֶיךָ לְהַכְרִית הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתֵיךָ כִּקְ בִּיאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה: ⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַחֵר וַיֹּאמֶר כְּדַבְּרְךָ לְמַעַן תִּדַּע כִּי־אֵין כִּי־הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ: ⁷ וַיִּסְרוּ הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִמֶּךָ וּמִבְּתֵיךָ וּמִעֲבָדֶיךָ וּמִעַמֶּךָ כִּקְ בִּיאֵר תִּשְׁאַרְנָה: ⁸ וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מֵעַם פַּרְעֹה וַיֵּצֵעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה עַל־דְּבַר הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם לְפַרְעֹה: ⁹ וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה כְּדַבְּרַ מֹשֶׁה וַיָּמָתוּ הַצְּפַרְדֵּיִם מִן־הַבָּתִּים מִן־הַחֲצֵרֹת וּמִן־הַשָּׂדוֹת: ¹⁰ וַיִּצְבְּרוּ אֹתָם חֲמָרִם חֲמָרִם וַתִּבְאֵשׁ הָאֶרֶץ: ¹¹ וַיִּרְא

Khnum, who was credited with having fashioned man out of clay. Hepat, associated with fertility, was believed to assist women at childbirth. Hence, the plague may have been taken as retribution for Pharaoh’s decree ordering the midwives to kill newborn Israelite males at birth.

4. Plead with the LORD For the first time, Pharaoh acknowledges the existence of YHVH. He makes a sweeping concession, but soon rescinds it.

6. that you may know that there is none like the LORD Pharaoh now “knows” God. He has yet to learn of His uniqueness.

CHAPTER 8

3. Pharaoh’s magicians cannot remove the frogs; they can only create more frogs, making matters even worse. Trying to spite Moses, they make their own lot worse. It is easier to

augment a plague (whether conflict, gossip, or greed) than to end one. Note too that Moses summons the frogs in obedience to God’s command. Pharaoh’s courtiers summon frogs as a way of showing that they can command the gods to obey them.

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 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.

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

פִּרְעָה כִּי הִיְתָה הַרְוָהָ וְהִכְבֵּד אֶת-לְבָבוֹ
וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה: ס
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן
נִטְה אֶת-מִטְּךָ וְהָךְ אֶת-עַפְרַר הָאָרֶץ וְהָיָה
לְכַנָּם בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ¹³ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן וַיִּטְּ
אַהֲרֹן אֶת-יָדוֹ בְּמִטְּהוֹ וַיִּךְ אֶת-עַפְרַר
הָאָרֶץ וַתְּהִי הַכְּנָם בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה כָּל-
עַפְרַר הָאָרֶץ הָיָה כְּנָיִם בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
¹⁴ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן הַחֲרֻטְמִים בְּלִטְיָהֶם לְהוֹצִיא
אֶת-הַכְּנָיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ וַתְּהִי הַכְּנָם
בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: ¹⁵ וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַחֲרֻטְמִים
אֶל-פִּרְעָה אָצַבַע אֱלֹהִים הוּא וַיַּחֲזֹק
לִב-פִּרְעָה וְלֹא-שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
יְהוָה: ס

¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הִשָּׁבִם בְּבֹקֶר
וְהִתְיַצֵּב לִפְנֵי פִרְעָה הִנֵּה יוֹצֵא הַמַּיִמָּה
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה שְׁלַח עִמִּי
וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי: ¹⁷ כִּי אִם-אֵינְךָ מְשַׁלַּח אֶת-עַמִּי
הַנִּנְיִ מְשַׁלִּיחַ בָּךְ וּבַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּבַעֲמָךְ

THIRD PLAGUE: VERMIN (*kinnim*) (vv. 12–15)

Without warning, the land is hit by an infestation of insects, identified by some as lice or mosquitoes. These carriers of deadly diseases, normally troublesome enough in Egypt during October and November, would now have multiplied astronomically in the wake of the prior plagues.

14–15. The magicians retire from the scene, their powers exhausted.

finger of God A supernatural phenomenon beyond human control.

FOURTH PLAGUE (*arov*) (vv. 16–28)

The second group of three plagues begins. Pharaoh is warned as he goes down to the river.

The nature of this plague cannot be identified with certainty because the Hebrew word *arov* occurs only here. Different interpretations existed already in ancient times. Usually the word was taken to mean “mixture,” and the most widely accepted understanding was “various kinds of wild animals.” An alternative tradition explains it as “swarms of insects,” specifically the dog fly, a bloodsucking insect that can multiply prodigiously in tropical and subtropical regions and is known to transmit anthrax and other animal diseases.

There are two unique features to this plague: (a) For the first time, a clear distinction is made between the Egyptians and the Israelites and (b) the day of the onset of the plague is fixed. The intent is to leave no doubt in Pharaoh that the

23. we must go a distance of three days Is Moses simply telling Pharaoh a justifiable lie, asking for less here in the hope of winning an agreement? (Sometimes deception appears to be the only tactic available to the powerless.)

Or is he calculating that once the Israelites have tasted freedom and realized there is an alternative to the way that they have been living, there would be no possibility of their returning to Egypt?

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, 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 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

וּבִבְתִיךָ אֶת-הָעֶרֶב וּמְלֹאוֹ בְּתֵי מִצְרַיִם
 אֶת-הָעֶרֶב וְגַם הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-הֵם עָלֶיהָ:
 18 וְהַפְּלִיתִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת-אֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן
 אֲשֶׁר עָמְלִי עָמַד עָלֶיהָ לְבִלְתִּי הַיּוֹת־שָׁם
 עֶרֶב לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּקֶרֶב
 הָאָרֶץ: 19 וְשִׁמְתִי פְדֹת בֵּין עַמִּי וּבֵין עַמֶּךָ
 לְמַחֵר יִהְיֶה הָאֵת הַזֶּה: 20 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה
 כִּן וַיָּבֵא עֶרֶב כַּבֹּד בֵּיתָה פְרָעֹה וּבֵית *
 עַבְדָּיו וּבְכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם תִּשְׁחַת הָאָרֶץ
 מִפְּנֵי הָעֶרֶב:

21 וַיִּקְרָא פְרָעֹה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְלֹא־הָרִן וַיֹּאמֶר
 לְכוּ זָבְחוּ לֵאלֹהֵיכֶם בְּאֶרֶץ: 22 וַיֹּאמֶר
 מֹשֶׁה לֹא נִכּוֹן לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת
 מִצְרַיִם נִזְבַּח לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ הֵן נִזְבַּח
 אֶת-תּוֹעֵבֶת מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵיהֶם וְלֹא
 יִסְקְלֵנוּ: 23 דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים נֵלֶךְ בַּמִּדְבָּר
 וְזָבַחְנוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר יֹאמֶר
 אֱלֹהֵינוּ: 24 וַיֹּאמֶר פְּרָעֹה אֲנֹכִי אֲשַׁלַּח
 אֶתְכֶם וְזָבַחְתֶּם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם בַּמִּדְבָּר

v. 20. סבירין ומטעין "ובבית"

source of the plague is not just a god (v. 15), but *YHVH*, God of Israel.

18. I will set apart the region of Goshen The Israelites also suffered the first three plagues. They will not suffer the rest.

Goshen In Gen. 45:10 this is the name given to the area of Israelite settlement in Egypt. Its precise location is unknown, although some evidence indicates it was in the region of Wadi Tumilat, which stretches from the eastern arm of the Nile to the Great Bitter Lake. Egyptian texts tell of the presence of Semites and other Asians in the north-eastern part of the country, both at the end of the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2250 B.C.E.) and ca. 1700 B.C.E. The concentration was especially strong in the New Kingdom from 1500 to 1000 B.C.E. Exodus 12:38 refers to a “mixed multitude” (that is, foreign tribes) dwelling in the area of Israelite settlement.

21. For the second time, Pharaoh makes a concession, this time more limited. He has reneged on his original promise and will do so again. *within the land* Not in the wilderness.

22–23. The Israelites do not know what animal sacrifice the Lord will demand of them. It may turn out that Egyptians will regard it as a sacrilege, because their religion venerates gods in animal form.

untouchable A deliberate ambiguity: The Hebrew word *to-evah* can mean “that which is taboo” to the Egyptians and also “that which is an [Egyptian] abomination” in the sight of Israel, namely, their animal divinities.

three days See Comment to 3:18.

24. Pharaoh seems to accept Moses’ reasoning and to relent.

I will let you go The Hebrew places the personal pronoun *anokhi*, “I,” before the verb to em-

not go very far. Plead, then, for me.”²⁵ And 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.

9 The LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me. ²For if you refuse to let them go, and continue to hold them, ³then the hand of the LORD will strike your livestock in the fields—the horses, the asses, the camels, the cattle, and the sheep—with a very severe pestilence. ⁴But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of the Egyptians, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites. ⁵The LORD has fixed the time: tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the

phasize the subject. In this way Pharaoh asserts his superior authority even though he is making a concession.

FIFTH PLAGUE: PESTILENCE (*dever*) (9:1–7)

The notion of sacred animals in Egyptian religion is now rendered absurd. The God of Israel strikes the animals with pestilence. The soil, contaminated by enormous mounds of rotting frogs, most likely became the breeding ground of disease, probably the highly infectious anthrax, which affected the cattle in the fields. Once again, the an-

רק הרחק לא-תרחיקו ללכת העתירו בעדי: ²⁵ ויאמר משה הנה אנכי יוצא מעמך והעתרתי אל-יהוה וסר הערב מפרעה מעבדיו ומעמו מחר רק אל-יסוף פרעה התל לבלתי שלח את-העם לזבח ליהוה:

²⁶ ויצא משה מעם פרעה ויעתר אל-יהוה: ²⁷ ויעש יהוה כדבר משה ויסר הערב מפרעה מעבדיו ומעמו לא נשאר אחד: ²⁸ ויכבד פרעה את-לבו גם בפעם הזאת ולא שלח את-העם: פ

ט ויאמר יהוה אל-משה בא אל-פרעה ודברת אליו כה-אמר יהוה אלהי העברים שלח את-עמי ויעבדני: ² כי אם-מאן אתה לשלח ועודך מחזיק בם: ³ הנה יד-יהוה הויה במקנך אשר בשדה בסוסיים בחמרים בגמלים בבקר ובצאן דבר כבד מאד: ⁴ והפלה יהוה בין מקנה ישראל ובין מקנה מצרים ולא ימות מכל-לבני ישראל דבר: ⁵ וישם יהוה מועד לאמר מחר יעשה יהוה הדבר

imals of the Israelites go untouched, the time of the plague’s onset is foretold, and Pharaoh is warned in his palace.

3. hand of the LORD As distinguished from the “finger of God” in 8:15. The “hand” is a symbol of power, used here both to punish and to coerce. In some ancient Near Eastern texts, diseases are described as “the hand of Ishtar,” “the hand of Nergal,” or “the hand” of other gods.

camels An anachronism. Camels were introduced to Egypt only later, during the Persian period (after 538 B.C.E.).

28. Human memories are so short. When Pharaoh was suffering, he could be compassionate toward his suffering slaves. When he

recovered, he lost that sense of compassion. (And note that here, Pharaoh hardens his own heart.)

land.”⁶ And the LORD did so the next day: all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not a beast died.⁷ When Pharaoh inquired, he found that not a head of the livestock of Israel had died; yet Pharaoh remained stubborn, and he would not let the people go.

⁸Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Each of you take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in the sight of Pharaoh.⁹ It shall become a fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and cause an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt.”¹⁰ So they took soot of the kiln and appeared before Pharaoh; Moses threw it toward the sky, and it caused an inflammation breaking out in boils on man and beast.¹¹ The magicians were unable to confront Moses because of the inflammation, for the inflammation afflicted the magicians as well as all the other Egyptians.¹² But the LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not heed them, just as the LORD had told Moses.

¹³The LORD said to Moses, “Early in the morning present yourself to Pharaoh and say

הַזֶּה בְּאָרֶץ: 6 וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוָה אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה מִמַּחֲרַת וַיָּמַת כָּל מִקְנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּמִמִּקְנֵה בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-מָת אֶחָד: 7 וַיִּשְׁלַח פְּרֹעֶה וְהִזָּה לֹא-מָת מִמִּקְנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד-אֶחָד וַיִּכְבַּד לֵב פְּרֹעֶה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת-הָעָם: פ

8 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַל-אַהֲרֹן קָחוּ לָכֶם מִלֵּא חֲפְנֵיכֶם פִּיחַ כִּבְשָׁן וּזְרְקוּ מֹשֶׁה הַשָּׁמַיְמָה לַעֲיִנֵי פְרֹעֶה: 9 וְהָיָה לְאַבְקָה עַל כָּל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה עַל-הָאָדָם וְעַל-הַבְּהֵמָה לִשְׁחִין פֶּרַח אֲבַעְבָּעַת בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: 10 וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת-פִּיחַ הַכִּבְשָׁן וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ לִפְנֵי פְרֹעֶה וַיִּזְרַק אֹתוֹ מֹשֶׁה הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וַיְהִי שְׁחִין אֲבַעְבָּעַת פֶּרַח בָּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה: 11 וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ הַחֲרָטְמִים לַעֲמֹד לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי הַשְּׁחִין כִּי-הָיָה הַשְּׁחִין בַּחֲרָטְמָם וּבְכָל-מִצְרַיִם: 12 וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פְּרֹעֶה וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵהֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה: ס

13 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה הֲשִׁבֵם בְּבִקְרֹה וְהִתְיַצַּב לִפְנֵי פְרֹעֶה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו כֹּה-

7. Pharaoh's need to learn whether the prediction made in verse 4 was fulfilled betrays a weakened self-confidence. Yet the clear evidence of God's power only reinforces his stubbornness.

SIXTH PLAGUE: BOILS (*sh'hin*) (vv. 8–12)

As the third in this group of three, this affliction arrives without warning. The plagues now become more intense. Words in Aramaic and Arabic from a root similar to *sh'hin* mean “to be hot; to be inflamed.” Thus it probably refers to an inflammation. There is great irony in the fact that Pharaoh's magicians were themselves so afflicted by the disease as to be totally immobilized.

8. soot from the kiln The significance of this

substance and of the accompanying action is unclear.

in the sight of Pharaoh So that he knows that this particular outbreak is not the familiar, common type but one that has been sent by God for a particular time and purpose.

9. breaking out This probably refers to the skin pustules and ulceration that characterize the disease known today as anthrax.

12. See 8:15, which implies that Pharaoh himself stiffened his heart.

SEVENTH PLAGUE: HAIL (*barad*) (vv. 13–35)

The third (and final) group of three plagues now begins. An escalation in terror and ruin will set

CHAPTER 9

12. But the LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh “Those in whom viciousness be-

comes second nature, those in whom brutality is linked with haughtiness, forfeit their ability and therefore their right” to the gift of free will (Heschel).

to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go to worship Me. ¹⁴For this time I will send all My plagues upon your person, and your courtiers, and your people, in order that you may know that there is none like Me in all the world. ¹⁵I could have stretched forth My hand and stricken you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been effaced from the earth. ¹⁶Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose: in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world. ¹⁷Yet you continue to thwart My people, and do not let them go! ¹⁸This time tomorrow I will rain down a very heavy hail, such as has not been in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹Therefore, order your livestock and everything you have in the open brought under shelter; every man and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall perish when the hail comes down upon them!” ²⁰Those among Pharaoh’s courtiers who feared the LORD’s word brought their slaves and livestock indoors to safety; ²¹but those who paid no regard to the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open.

²²The LORD said to Moses, “Hold out your arm toward the sky that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, upon man and beast and all the grasses of the field in the land of Egypt.” ²³So Moses held out his rod toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire streamed down to the ground, as the LORD rained down hail upon the land of Egypt. ²⁴The hail was very heavy—fire flashing in the midst of the hail—such as had not fallen on the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. ²⁵Throughout the

אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וְיַעֲבֹדֵנִי: ¹⁴ כִּי | בַּפְּעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שְׁלַח אֶת־כָּל־מַגִּפְתֵּי אֱלֹהֵי לְבָבְךָ וּבַעֲבֹדֶיךָ וּבַעֲמֻמְךָ בַּעֲבוּר תִּדְעַ כִּי אֵין כַּמִּנִּי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ: ¹⁵ כִּי עַתָּה שְׁלַחְתִּי אֶת־יָדִי וְאָף אוֹתְךָ וְאֶת־עַמֻּמְךָ בַּדָּבָר וּתִפְחָד מִן־הָאָרֶץ: ¹⁶ וְאוֹלָם בַּעֲבוּר זֹאת הָעַמְדָּתִיךָ בַּעֲבוּר הָרֵאִתְךָ אֶת־כַּחֲסִי וּלְמַעַן סַפֵּר שְׁמִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ: ¹⁷ עוֹדֶךָ מִסְתּוֹלֵל בְּעַמִּי לְבַלְתִּי שְׁלַחְם: ¹⁸ הַנִּנִּי מִמְטִיר כְּעַת מִחֹר בָּרֶד כָּבֵד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה כְּמָהוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם לְמִן־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְעַד־עַתָּה: ¹⁹ וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הַעֲזוּ אֶת־מִקְנֶיךָ וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לָךְ בַּשָּׂדֶה כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא בַּשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאָסֵף הַבֵּיתָה וְיֵרֵד עֲלֵהֶם הַבָּרָד וּמָתוּ: ²⁰ הִירָא אֶת־דָּבָר יְהוָה מֵעַבְדֵי פְרַעֲהַ הַנִּיֵּס אֶת־עַבְדֵּיךָ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ אֶל־הַבַּתִּיּוֹם: ²¹ וְאֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׂם לְבוֹ אֶל־דָּבָר יְהוָה וְיַעֲזֹב אֶת־עַבְדֵּיךָ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה: פ

²² וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטֵּה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי בָרֶד בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־הָאָדָם וְעַל־הַבְּהֵמָה וְעַל כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ²³ וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מִטְּהוֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהוֶה נָתַן קִלְתוֹ וּבָרָד וַתִּהְלַךְ אֵשׁ אַרְצָה וַיִּמְטֵר יְהוָה בָּרֶד עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ²⁴ וַיְהִי בָרֶד וְאֵשׁ מִתְּלַקַּחַת בְּתוֹף הַבָּרָד כָּבֵד מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה כְּמָהוּ בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאֲזוּ הָיְתָה לְגוֹי: ²⁵ וַיֵּף הַבָּרָד בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ

the stage for the climactic catastrophe. This accounts for the unusual length of the next warning to Pharaoh. For the first time, the Egyptians and their livestock will be offered the chance to take shelter, and some will avail themselves

of it. Also for the first time, Pharaoh will openly admit to being at fault.

14. all My plagues This phrase either introduces the last four plagues or alludes to their overwhelming consequences.

land of Egypt the hail struck down all that were in the open, both man and beast; the hail also struck down all the grasses of the field and shattered all the trees of the field. ²⁶Only in the region of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

²⁷Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron and said to them, "I stand guilty this time. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸Plead with the LORD that there may be an end of God's thunder and of hail. I will let you go; you need stay no longer." ²⁹Moses said to him, "As I go out of the city, I shall spread out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease and the hail will fall no more, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD's. ³⁰But I know that you and your courtiers do not yet fear the LORD God."—³¹Now the flax and barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud; ³²but the wheat and the emmer were not hurt, for they ripen late.—³³Leaving Pharaoh, Moses went outside the city and spread out his hands to the LORD: the thunder and the hail ceased, and no

מִצְרַיִם אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה מֵאָדָם וְעַד-
 בְּהֵמָה וְאֵת כָּל-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה הַכָּה הַבָּרָד
 וְאֶת-כָּל-עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁבַר: ²⁶רַק בְּאֶרֶץ
 גֹּשֶׁן אֲשֶׁר-שָׂם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא הָיָה בָרָד:
²⁷וַיִּשְׁלַח פָּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן
 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם חַטָּאתִי הַפַּעַם יְהוָה
 הִצְדִּיק וְאֲנִי וְעַמִּי הִרְשָׁעִים: ²⁸הֲעִתִּירוּ
 אֲלֵי-יְהוָה וְרַב מְהִיֵּת קִלְתֵּי אֱלֹהִים וּבָרָד
 וְאִשְׁלַחָה אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא תִסְפּוּן לַעֲמֹד:
²⁹וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מֹשֶׁה כִּצְאֵתִי אֶת-הָעִיר
 אֲפָרֵשׁ אֶת-כַּפֵּי אֱלֹהֵי הַקְּלֹת יַחְדָּלוּן
 וְהַבָּרָד לֹא יִהְיֶה-עוֹד לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי
 לַיהוָה הָאָרֶץ: ³⁰וְאֵתָה וְעַבְדֶּיךָ יִדְעֵתִי
 כִּי טָרָם תִּירְאוּן מִפְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים:
³¹וְהַפְּשַׁתָּה וְהִשְׁעַרְתָּ נֹכַתָּה כִּי הִשְׁעַרְתָּ
 אָבִיב וְהַפְּשַׁתָּה גִבְעֹל: ³²וְהַחֲטָה
 וְהִכְסַּמְתָּ לֹא נָכוּ כִּי אֲפִילַת הַנָּה: ³³וַיֵּצֵא
 מֹשֶׁה מֵעַם פָּרְעֹה אֶת-הָעִיר וַיִּפְרֹשׁ כַּפָּיו
 אֲלֵי-יְהוָה וַיַּחְדְּלוּ הַקְּלֹת וְהַבָּרָד וּמָטָר

מפטר

27. this time Pharaoh echoes the identical phrase used by God in His forewarning in verse 14.

28. Pharaoh's concession now appears to be unqualified.

29. spread out my hands An attitude of prayer.

that the earth is the LORD's It is God, and not the Egyptian gods, who is sovereign over nature.

30. Moses senses that Pharaoh's confession of guilt consists only of empty words.

31–32. This note creates suspense, because it delays Moses' response to Pharaoh's plea in light of verse 30 and it explains why, despite the dev-

astation of crops caused by the hail, there still remained a residue for the locusts in the next plague (10:5).

In Egypt, flax was normally sown at the beginning of January and was in bloom three weeks later; barley was sown in August and harvested in February.

emmer A species of wheat that, together with barley and winter wheat, made up the three chief cereals of Egypt.

ripen late Wheat and emmer are planted in August and harvested in March or April. Hence, they were less vulnerable than flax and barley.

27. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong Pharaoh's words can be punctuated to read, "The LORD is righteous and so am I, but my people are wicked." In other words, perhaps Pharaoh is trying to excuse himself, saying, "Don't blame me! I would have let the Israelites go, but my people would not have let me."

32. The wheat and the emmer were not hurt To leave something for the locusts to devour in the next plague? Or perhaps to teach the lesson that one should always leave an adversary with enough to live on, rather than leave that person with nothing to lose (*Yad Yosef*). Despite the battering, Pharaoh still refuses to give in. The worst of the plagues is yet to come.

rain came pouring down upon the earth. ³⁴But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he became stubborn and reverted to his guilty ways, as did his courtiers. ³⁵So Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had foretold through Moses.

לֹא־נָתַן אֶרְצָה: ³⁴ וַיֵּרָא פֶּרֶעָה כִּי־חָדַל
הַמָּטֶר וְהַבָּרָד וְהַקָּלִת וַיִּסָּף לַחֹטָא וַיִּכְבַּד
לְבוֹ הוּא וְעַבְדָּיו: ³⁵ וַיִּחְזַק לֵב פֶּרֶעָה וְלֹא
שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה
בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה: פ

34. Once again Pharaoh yields to his treacherous impulses.

Moses had previously conveyed to the people God's foreknowledge of Pharaoh's obstinacy (see v. 30), a fact not explicitly stated.

35. *foretold through Moses* This implies that

הַפְּטָרָה וְאֵרָא

HAFTARAH FOR VA-ERA

EZEKIEL 28:25–29:21

This *haftarah* is drawn from Ezekiel's oracles against foreign nations (Ezek. 25–32). The main body of the reading is a series of pronouncements against Egypt. They are framed by two oracles of hope for the people Israel (28:25–26, 29:21), which anticipate their restoration from exile to the Land.

Ezekiel's opening prophecy against Egypt may be dated to the beginning of 586 B.C.E., when the nation Israel placed some hope in an alliance with Egypt during the final, fatal Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (see Jer. 37:5). Israel's vain hope is the basis of the prophet's vilification of an undependable Egypt (Ezek. 29:7). The oracle mocks Egypt, through its Pharaoh (29:3–5).

Key words in Hebrew underscore the themes of Israelite restoration and Egyptian doom. The cluster concerned with ingathering and dispersion, true security and false trust is particularly forceful. In the opening oracle (28:25–26), the house of Israel that has "been dispersed" (*nafotzu*) among the "peoples" (*ammim*) is promised that they will be "gathered" (*kabtz*) by God to their homeland, where they will "dwell" (*yashvu*) in "security" (*la-vetah*). By contrast, doomed Egypt (in the figure of the "pharaonic fish") will be caught and left "unburied" (*v'lo tikkavetz*, literally "ungathered") on its shores (29:5) or scattered by God (*v'hafitzoti*) among the nations (29:12). So great is their punishment that, although God "will gather" (*akabbetz*) the Egyptians from "the peoples" (*ha-ammim*) among whom they were dispersed (*nafotzu*, 29:13), they will not rise to their former greatness and will never again "be the trust" (*l'mivtah*) of the house of Israel (29:16).

These acts of divine might will convince Israel and Egypt alike that the Lord is the true God. Both of them "shall know" (*v'yad'u*) that the Lord is God (28:26, 29:6, 16, 21). This motif of recognition is a signature feature of the prophet Eze-

kiel, and it echoes the formula first found in the Book of Exodus. There too, by signs and wonders, the Lord promises that both Israel and the Egyptians will come to know (*v'yad'u, v'yada-atem*) His awesome might. (On Egypt, see Exod. 7:5, 14:4, 18. On Israel, see Exod. 6:7; 10:2) Such knowledge is born of direct experience, a theological assertion confirmed through the specific events of history.

To underscore the effect of divine victory, the Egyptian enemy is portrayed through a figure of mythic arrogance. The Pharaoh is identified with the "mighty monster" of the Nile who proclaims that "My Nile is my own; / I made it for myself" (or even: I have created myself; 29:3). The defeat of this monster (called *tannim*, like *tannin*) echoes God's destruction of ancient sea monsters. Ezekiel mocks the molester's claims of inviolable might. The arrogant king is humbled, flung like a rotten fish on the banks. In this victory God's providential power and might are exalted.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The *parashah* and the *haftarah* present an old and a new judgment against Egypt. As the first judgment came to pass with Israel's liberation, so the new judgment against Egypt is marked by promises of Israel's ingathering and the sprouting of its "horn" of strength, victory (29:21). History is thus seen as a recurrent pattern of divine acts of redemption. As a prophecy of future liberation, Ezekiel draws on the imagery of the first great act of divine salvation for Israel: the Exodus from Egypt. Through His saving acts God again will be recognized as the transcendent source of redemption and will vindicate human hopes in freedom from oppression. The *haftarah* taken from Ezekiel's prophecy is thus a counterpoint to his-

torical despair. The people are challenged to look beyond political alliances and the false confidences they bring (29:6–7,16). Only divine power will liberate the people.

A rich verbal and thematic tapestry links the two units. For example, there are judgments

against enemies (*sh'fatim*) and a plagued Nile (*Y'or*), which yields dead fish (Exod. 7:4,20; Ezek. 28:26, 29:3–5,10). The linkage in the motif of both Israel and Egypt coming to know God was noted earlier.

28 ²⁵Thus said the Lord God: When I have gathered the House of Israel from the peoples among which they have been dispersed, and have shown Myself holy through them in the sight of the nations, they shall settle on their own soil, which I gave to My servant Jacob, ²⁶and they shall dwell on it in security. They shall build houses and plant vineyards, and shall dwell on it in security, when I have meted out punishment to all those about them who despise them. And they shall know that I the LORD am their God.

29 In the tenth year, on the twelfth day of the tenth month, the word of the LORD came to me: ²O mortal, turn your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. ³Speak these words:

Thus said the Lord God:

I am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt,

Mighty monster, sprawling in your channels,

Who said,

My Nile is my own;

I made it for myself.

Ezekiel 28:25. When I . . . have shown Myself holy through them Ezekiel expresses the striking notion that God Himself is sanctified. God declares that His sanctity is manifest in His restoration of the people Israel to their homeland.

Ezekiel 29:1. In the tenth year Dated from 597 B.C.E., the beginning of King Jehoiachin's exile to Babylon.

כח ²⁵כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּקִבְצֵי אֶת־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר נִפְצוּ בָם וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בָם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עַל־אֲדָמָתָם אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְעַבְדֵי לַיַּעֲקֹב: ²⁶וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עָלֶיהָ לְבֵטַח וּבָנוּ בָתִּים וְנִטְעוּ כַרְמִים וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְבֵטַח בַּעֲשׂוֹתַי שְׁפֹטִים בְּכָל הַשָּׂאטִים * אַתֶּם מִסְבִּיבוֹתֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם: ס

כט בַּשָּׁנָה הָעֲשִׂירִית בַּעֲשָׂרֵי בַשָּׁנִים עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הָיָה דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: ²בֶּן־אָדָם שִׁים פְּנֶיךָ עַל־פְּרַעֲה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְהִנָּבֵא עָלָיו וְעַל־מִצְרַיִם כֹּלָּה: ³דַּבֵּר וְאָמַרְתָּ

כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ פְּרַעֲה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם הַתַּנִּים הַגְּדוֹל הַרְבֵּץ בְּתוֹךְ יַאֲרֵיו אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יַאֲרֵי וְאֲנִי עָשִׂיתִנִּי:

v. 26. יתיר א'

3. I made it for myself Pharaoh boasts of having created the Nile. He thus claims self-sufficiency. Alternatively, the Hebrew verb here (*asitini*) means "I have made myself." This is the more radical mythic assertion, laden with the hubris of self-creation. It is so understood in many rabbinic *midrashim* and liturgical poems.

4I will put hooks in your jaws,
And make the fish of your channels
Cling to your scales;
I will haul you up from your channels,
With all the fish of your channels
Clinging to your scales.

5And I will fling you into the desert,
With all the fish of your channels.
You shall be left lying in the open,
Ungathered and unburied:

I have given you as food
To the beasts of the earth
And the birds of the sky.

6Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know
That I am the LORD.

Because you were a staff of reed
To the House of Israel:

7When they grasped you with the hand, you
would splinter,
And wound all their shoulders,
And when they leaned on you, you would
break,

And make all their loins unsteady.

8Assuredly, thus said the Lord God: Lo, I will
bring a sword against you, and will cut off man
and beast from you, 9so that the land of Egypt
shall fall into desolation and ruin. And they shall
know that I am the LORD—because he boasted,
“The Nile is mine, and I made it.” 10Assuredly,
I am going to deal with you and your channels,
and I will reduce the land of Egypt to utter ruin
and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, all the
way to the border of Nubia. 11No foot of man
shall traverse it, and no foot of beast shall tra-

4 וְנָתַתִּי חַיִּים בְּלִחְיֶיךָ

וְהִדְבַקְתִּי דַגְתֵי יַאֲרֶיךָ

בְּקִשְׁשֹׁתֶיךָ

וְהִעֲלִיתִיךָ מִתּוֹךְ יַאֲרֶיךָ

וְאֵת כָּל־דַּגְתֵי יַאֲרֶיךָ

בְּקִשְׁשֹׁתֶיךָ תִּדְבֹק:

5 וְנִטְשְׁתִּיךָ הַמִּדְבָּרָה

אֹתְךָ וְאֵת כָּל־דַּגְתֵי יַאֲרֶיךָ

עַל־פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה תִּפּוּל

לֹא תֶאֱסֹף וְלֹא תִקְבֹץ

לְחַיַּת הָאָרֶץ

וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

נָתַתִּיךָ לְאֹכְלָהּ:

6 וַיִּדְעוּ כָל־יֹשְׁבֵי מִצְרַיִם

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה

יַעַן הָיִיתֶם מִשְׁעֵנֶת קִנְיָה

לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

7 בְּתַפְשָׁם בְּךָ בַכֶּפֶר בַּכַּף תִּרְוֹץ

וּבִקְעַת לְהֵם כָּל־כִּתְּךָ

וּבַהֲשָׁעָנָם עָלֶיךָ תִשָּׁבֵר

וְהִעֲמַדְתָּ לְהֵם כָּל־מַתְנַיִם: 8

8 לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַנְּנִי מִבְּיַא

עָלֶיךָ חֶרֶב וְהִכְרַתִּי מִמֶּךָ אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה:

9 וְהִיְתָה אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם לְשִׁמְמָה וְחִרְבָּה

וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה יַעַן אָמַר יְאֹר לִי וְאֲנִי

עָשִׂיתִי: 10 לָכֵן הַנְּנִי אֶלֶיךָ וְאֶל־יַאֲרֶיךָ

וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְחִרְבוֹת חֶרֶב

שִׁמְמָה מִמִּגְדֹל סוּנָה וְעַד־גְּבוּל כּוּשׁ:

11 לֹא תַעֲבֹר־בָּהּ רֵגֶל אָדָם וְרֵגֶל בְּהֵמָה

לֹא תַעֲבֹר־בָּהּ וְלֹא תִשָּׁב אֶרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה:

4. I will put books in your jaws This capture and destruction of a sea serpent allude to ancient mythic motifs of battles between God and the *tannin*-monster found elsewhere in the Bible (see Isa. 51:9; Ps. 74:13ff.; Job 26:12).

6. a staff of reed The portrayal of false confidence in political alliances as trust in a broken

reed is first found in the prophecies of Isaiah, where an Assyrian envoy describes Israel's trust in Egypt in such terms (Isa. 36:6). By contrast, a postexilic prophecy portrays God's chosen servant as a reliable reed, an unbreakable source of divine instruction to the nations (Isa. 42:1–4).

10. from Migdol to Syene A comprehensive

verse it; and it shall remain uninhabited for forty years. ¹²For forty years I will make the land of Egypt the most desolate of desolate lands, and its cities shall be the most desolate of ruined cities. And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them throughout the countries.

¹³Further, thus said the Lord God: After a period of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the peoples among whom they were dispersed. ¹⁴I will restore the fortunes of the Egyptians and bring them back to the land of their origin, the land of Pathros, and there they shall be a lowly kingdom. ¹⁵It shall be the lowliest of all the kingdoms, and shall not lord it over the nations again. I will reduce the Egyptians, so that they shall have no dominion over the nations. ¹⁶Never again shall they be the trust of the House of Israel, recalling its guilt in having turned to them. And they shall know that I am the Lord God.

¹⁷In the twenty-seventh year, on the first day of the first month, the word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁸O mortal, King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon has made his army expend vast labor on Tyre; every head is rubbed bald and every shoulder scraped. But he and his army have had no return for the labor he expended on Tyre. ¹⁹Assuredly, thus said the Lord God: I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadrezzar, king of

geographic designation of Egypt, from north to south. (Cf. the designation of Israel as “from Dan to Beersheba” in Judg. 20:1.)

12. forty years The number 40 is well known in biblical literature as a comprehensive period of time, perhaps two generations. It is used to mark the number of years during which the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, in punishment for the period of 40 days in which the faithless spies scouted the land (Num. 14:33–34).

17ff. This oracle promises the spoils of Egypt to King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon, as a reward for his siege against Tyre. This prophecy is dated to 571 B.C.E. (the 27th year of Jehoiachin’s exile),

וַנִּתְּתִי אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁמָמָה בְּתוֹךְ אֶרְצוֹת נִשְׁמֹת וְעַרְיָה בְּתוֹךְ עָרִים מִחֲרֻבוֹת תִּהְיֶינָה שְׁמָמָה אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה וְהִפְצַלְתִּי אֶת-מִצְרַיִם בְּגוֹלִים וְזָרִיתִים בְּאֶרְצוֹת: פ

כִּי כֹה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה מֶלֶךְ אַרְבַּעִים שָׁנָה אֶקְבֹּץ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם מִן-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר-נִפְצְאוּ שָׁמָּה: ¹⁴ וְשִׁבַּתִּי אֶת-שְׁבוֹת מִצְרַיִם וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי אֹתָם אֶרֶץ פַּתְרוֹס עַל-אֶרֶץ מְכוּרְתָם וְהָיוּ שָׁם מַמְלָכָה שְׁפִלָּה: ¹⁵ מִן-הַמַּמְלָכוֹת תִּהְיֶיהָ שְׁפִלָּה וְלֹא-תִתְנַשֵּׂא עוֹד עַל-הַגּוֹיִם וְהִמְעַטְתִּים לְבַלְתִּי רְדוֹת בְּגוֹיִם: ¹⁶ וְלֹא יִהְיֶה-עוֹד לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִבְטָח מִזְכִּיר עֵין בְּפָנֹתָם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה: פ

וַיְהִי בְּעֶשְׂרִים וּשְׁבַע שָׁנָה בְּרִאשׁוֹן בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הָיָה דְבַר-יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר: ¹⁸ בֶּן-אָדָם נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל הָעֹבֵיד אֶת-חִילוֹ עֲבָדָה גְדֹלָה אֶל-צָר בַּל-רֹאשׁ מְקָרַח וְכַל-כֶּתֶף מְרוּטָה וְשֹׁכֵר לֹא-הָיָה לוֹ וְלִחִילוֹ מִצָּר עַל-הָעֲבָדָה אֲשֶׁר-עָבַד עֲלֶיהָ: ¹⁹ לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הַנְּנִי נָתַן לְנְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְנִשְׂא הַמָּנָה וְשָׁלַל

17 years after the announcement of Egypt’s doom (29:1). This is a transformation of an older oracle against Tyre, in which it was predicted that Nebuchadrezzar would “plunder its wealth” (Ezek. 26:7–14). Because the prophecy did not come to pass, Ezekiel now promises Nebuchadrezzar the booty of Egypt. This is a classic example of reapplying a prophecy that failed to materialize in the specifics of its original form. Here it dramatizes the providential role of Israel’s God in the fate of other nations.

18. Nebuchadrezzar This form corresponds to the Babylonian name. The better known biblical variant is “Nebuchadnezzar.”

Babylon. He shall carry off her wealth and take her spoil and seize her booty; and she shall be the recompense of his army. ²⁰As the wage for which he labored, for what they did for Me, I give him the land of Egypt—declares the Lord GOD.

²¹On that day I will endow the House of Israel with strength, and you shall be vindicated among them. And they shall know that I am the LORD.

שָׁלְלָהּ וּבָנֹן בָּזָה וְהִיְתָה שָׂכָר לְחִילוֹ:
²⁰פָּעֲלָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר-עָבַד בָּהּ נִתַּתִּי לוֹ אֶת-
 אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ לִי נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי
 יְהוָה: ס

²¹בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶצְמִיחַ קֶרֶן לְבַיִת יִשְׂרָאֵל
 וְלָךְ אֲתָן פְּתֻחֹן-פֶּה בְּתוֹכָם וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי-
 אֲנִי יְהוָה: פ

21. I will endow the House of Israel with strength, and you shall be vindicated among them Literally, “I will cause a horn to sprout for the House of Israel, and I will grant you an open-

ing of the mouth.” Some commentators understand the horn as referring to Cyrus, whose edict in 538 B.C.E. allowed Babylonian Jews to return to the land of Israel (Rashi, Radak).