
EXODUS 1-17

Lesson 7, Old Testament, Adult Religion Class, Tuesday, 11 Oct 2011

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OUTLINE

1. Oppression in Egypt (1:1-22)
2. Moses the Egyptian (2:1-15a)
3. Moses the Midianite (2:15b-25)
4. Moses the prophet (3:1 – 4:31)
5. Confrontations with Pharaoh (5:1 – 11:10)
 - a. Bricks without straw (5:1-23)
 - b. Reassurance (6:1-13)
 - c. Genealogy (6:14-27)
 - d. Aaron a spokesman (6:28 – 7:7)
 - e. Staff into a snake (7:8-13)
 - f. (1) River into blood (7:14-25)
 - g. (2) Frogs (8:1-15)
 - h. (3) Lice (8:16-19)
 - i. (4) Flies (8:20-32)
 - j. (5) Dead livestock (9:1-7)
 - k. (6) Boils (9:8-12)
 - l. (7) Hail (9:13-35)
 - m. (8) Locusts (10:1-20)
 - n. (9) Darkness (10:21-29)
 - o. (10) Death of firstborn (11:1-10)
6. First Passover (12:1-36)
7. Departure (12:37-51)
8. Firstborn sanctified (13:1-16)
9. Led by the Lord (13:17 – 14:4)
10. Crossing the sea (14:5-31)
11. Songs of Moses and Miriam (15:1-21)
12. Fed by the Lord (15:22 – 17:7)
13. War with Amalek (17:8-16)

INTRODUCTION

There are many opinions in answer to the question: “Did the exodus **really happen?**” Some feel that the story is a late fabrication of post-exilic Jews. Others say that the details are late but there is some core story that was handed down over the years. Still others feel that the story as it is written in Exodus is exactly correct. Challenges include the difficulty tying it to a specific period in Egyptian history, with no specifics about the Pharaoh (which is a title, not a name), and no archaeological or historical information attesting to the events described. But the general context fits well into the post-Hyksos period in Egypt—the New Kingdom or Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties—and the lack of specific evidence is not surprising, given the general tendency not to preserve defeats or records about slaves. There is good evidence for Semites traveling to Egypt, especially in times of famine (as Jacob did), living in the Nile delta, and having Semites be slaves

for delta area building projects (Holzapfel 78-80; Zondervan 162-163).

But even if we can’t get the exact date or name the Pharaoh of the exodus, the message comes through clearly. There are **two parts** to Exodus. The first recounts the story of the Lord freeing the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage (this lesson). It takes place in Egypt and the area between Egypt and Sinai. The second part (next lesson) records the giving of God’s law to the people and the instructions to build the tabernacle. This part takes place at Sinai—in fact, the children of Israel will call Sinai ‘home’ all through the rest of Exodus, Leviticus, and the first ten chapters of Numbers. Both parts of Exodus have a shared purpose: to remind us that God remembers his covenants and promises and fulfills them. Our responsibility is to obey and worship him, for which he blesses us abundantly.

OPPRESSION IN EGYPT (1:1-22)

INTRODUCTION

After giving a list of Jacob's sons representing those who had gone down to Egypt, Exodus tells us that "there arose up a **new king** over Egypt, which knew not Joseph" (8). Though Exodus does not give us the names of any Pharaohs, the situation described aligns with the transition from the Hyksos' reign to the return of Egyptian control under Kamose (1555 B.C.). This starts the period known as the **New Kingdom** in Egyptian history, which spans several centuries. The **18th Dynasty** was the first of the New Kingdom period and had many famous kings, including Thutmose III who conquered much of the known world; Akhenaten, the so-called heretic Pharaoh who attempted (unsuccessfully) to change the religious system to the worship of Aten, the sun disk; and Tutankhamun, commonly known as King

Tut, whose tomb was found virtually untouched and is still the greatest Pharaonic discovery to date. The **19th Dynasty** included three kings named Ramesses I, Sety I, and **Ramesses II**, also called "the Great" because of his long reign (nearly 67 years), diplomatic and military triumphs, and abundant building projects, including many in the Nile Delta area where the children of Israel were. Many believe Ramesses II was the Pharaoh of Exodus but there is not enough evidence to say definitively. What is clear is that after being favored, a shift in the kingdom caused the Israelites to go from favored status to slaves, and the new king was concerned they would "join also unto our enemies" (10) and put Egypt at risk.

COMMENTARY

The two cities mentioned "**Pithom and Raamses**" (11) are probably modern Tell el-Retabeh and Qantir, respectively. Both were major construction sites during the reign of Ramesses II, with the king moving his capital there after it was built with his four square mile palace and government offices (Zondervan 167-168). Much of this building was done with slave labor, as described in this chapter.

In an effort to curb the growth of the slaves, Pharaoh took **four progressively serious actions**. None of them worked. First, he put them under hard labor ("afflict them with their burdens," 11). Then he put them under "hard bondage" (14). When that did nothing, he commanded the midwives to kill the sons born but let the daughters live. "But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded" (17), using the excuse that the children were born before they could arrive. (interesting that we don't know Pharaoh's name but we know the midwives'—Shiphrah ('fair') and Puah ('splendid').) So his final effort was to have "all his people" authorized to "cast into the river" (22) all

the sons of Israel. This wasn't direct drowning but 'exposure' or putting the babies in baskets which would float for a time but finally sink, drowning the infant. Ironically, this is the exact plan that saved Moses' life—and drowning was the final fate of Pharaoh's armies (JPS 109).

Robert Millet (Jackson 95-96) points out that the ancient Jewish historian, **Josephus**, wrote that a scribe had told Pharaoh that **a child** would be born to the Israelites that would reduce Egypt's power, raise the Israelites, and excel as a man of virtue and glory who would be "remembered through all ages." Fearing his own downfall and not just for the sake of population control, Pharaoh thus ordered all male children to be killed. This, of course, is reminiscent of the future slaughter of the babies at Bethlehem at the time of Christ (Matthew 2) and interesting in light of the prophecies of Joseph, the son of Israel, as reflected in 2 Nephi 3 and JST Genesis 50:24-25, where Moses is specifically mentioned. Perhaps the scribe was quoting those writings and Pharaoh's reaction was why they were suppressed.

MOSES THE EGYPTIAN (2:1-15A)

INTRODUCTION

Moses' life can be evenly divided into **three stages** of 40 years each—Moses the royal Egyptian, Moses the Midianite shepherd, and Moses the prophet of YHWH. Forty often represents a lengthy but indeterminate period of time—but it also can mean forty years. In Moses' case, the former seems more

likely because of the perfect division of his life. Whatever the length, Moses the Egyptian gets the least amount of coverage as we know almost nothing other than his birth and a single incident that propels him to leave Egypt.

COMMENTARY

Moses' parents are not named here but are in 6:20 – **Amram** and **Jochebed**. She became pregnant and had a boy, who would have been killed, if discovered by the Egyptians. So Jochebed hid the unnamed baby for three months. Finally, fearing she couldn't keep his life a secret any longer, she likely saw no choice but to put him in the river herself; if she didn't, the first Egyptian to discover him could. The word used for what she built, "**ark**" (3) is the same word used to describe Noah's boat and are the only two times the word is used in scripture. But she broke from the norm and sealed the papyrus basket "with **slime** and with **pitch**" (3), meaning bitumen and tar which would help keep the water out. She wanted him to float as long as possible and have every chance to survive. Putting him in the river by some **reeds** ("flags," 3, the same word later used to name the sea the children of Israel crossed—see Exodus 15 below), she left, perhaps not able to watch what happened to her precious son, but trusting in God. She did give the **older sister** the assignment to watch and come back to report to her "what would be done to him" (4).

Moses' story is in good company. It was said that the great Mesopotamian king, Sargon, was the son of a high priestess who put him in a basket lined with bitumen and put him in the Euphrates river where he was rescued by Aqqi, the water drawer, and raised as his son. The Egyptian god Horus was likewise hidden in a papyrus thicket along the Nile by his mother, Isis, to save his life. Paris, the son of Priam of Troy, was abandoned to die on Mount Ida because it was predicted he would ruin the city (which he did). There are other examples in ancient

literature with a similar theme—the child that is abandoned and exposed (either in an attempt to kill him or to preserve him) lives and fulfills his destiny (Pritchard 119; Zondervan 170; JPS 109).

At the same time, **Pharaoh's daughter** came to wash at the river's edge (did Jochebed anticipate that?). She spotted the little ark in the reeds and had a slave bring it to her. Discovering the baby, she knew immediately it was a **Hebrew**—why else would it be floating in the river?—but determined to keep it. Seeing a miraculous opportunity, the sister boldly approached, asking if the woman would like "a **nurse** of the Hebrew women" (7) to feed the baby. The offer was accepted and the girl scurried home to tell the news to her mother—she could have her son back under the protection of the royal house.

Once the child was weaned, Jochebed "brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son" (10). She gave him a good Egyptian name, "**Moses**" (meaning 'gave birth' or 'fathered') though in Exodus it is missing the name of the god as other related names had: e.g., Ramesses ('Ra gave birth') or Thutmose ('Thoth gave birth'). The text notes that she gave this name "because I drew him out of the water" (10), which surely refers to the river 'giving birth' to him and not to the speculative and difficult Hebrew equivalent (*m-sh-h*) some commentaries impose on her phrase. Given that scenario, perhaps his full name was Hapi-Moses or Sobek-Moses, two gods associated with the Nile river.

We know nothing else of Moses' childhood, but when he "was grown" (11), he knew his heritage and who he was. "He went out unto his brethren and looked

on their burdens” (11), burdens which he never knew in Pharaoh’s court. During his tour, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave to death (“smiting,” 11, has the meaning of hitting as well as killing). Making sure he was not seen, he “**slew the Egyptian**” (using for “slew” the same term that is used to describe what the Egyptian was doing to the Hebrew slave in the previous verse) and buried the body.

But one person had seen him—the man he saved—and news spread quickly. The next day, two Hebrews were fighting. Moses intervened and one said, “Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to **kill me**, as thou killedst the Egyptian?” (14). Moses was afraid at hearing this, and with good reason; as soon as **Pharaoh** heard what he had done, “he sought to **slay Moses**” (15).

MOSES THE MIDIANITE (2:15B-25)

COMMENTARY

Fearing for his life, Moses quickly **left Egypt**, striking out to the east and ending up in **Midian**, the home of some of the descendants of Keturah, Abraham’s third wife. Seven daughters of “the priest of Midian” (16), whose name was **Reuel** (18, ‘friend of God’) or **Jethro** (3:1, ‘his abundance’) came to the well where he was resting, but so did other shepherds who drove the women away. Moses came to their defense and watered their animals. In this incident, Moses followed a pattern established by others before him, especially his ancestor Jacob/Israel.

Bringing him to his house for dinner, the priest eventually offered his daughter, **Zipporah** (21), to

Moses as his wife, and she had their first son, **Gershom** (22, ‘foreigner’), signifying Moses’ status as “a stranger in a strange land” (22).

Meanwhile, the king who wanted to kill Moses died, but the slaves in Egypt still suffered; they “cried, and their **cry** came up unto God” (23). This is the same cry that triggered the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—that of the oppressed victim (cf. Genesis 18:20). So God “remembered his covenant with Abraham” (24) and his posterity, meaning that he deliberately thought on it, causing him to “respect” them, or recognize and acknowledge them.

MOSES THE PROPHET (3:1 – 4:31)

INTRODUCTION

Moses received a call from the Lord, starting with a remarkable experience seeing a burning bush that was not consumed. He was commissioned by the Lord to return to Egypt and be a prophet to the people and to Pharaoh himself. Moses had many doubts which the Lord patiently addressed. One

detail sometimes missed is that Moses left twice—once with his family and once with Aaron. He returned between the two to Midian for a time, which helped him learn substantially more in preparation for his mission.

COMMENTARY

It had been forty years since Moses fled Egypt. He had made a life among the people of Midian and worked the flocks of his wife’s family. In the course of caring for them, he brought them to “the mountain of God, even to **Horeb**” (3:1), which means ‘wasteland, desert.’ Most believe that Horeb and

Sinai are two names for the same mountain because both are called “the mountain of God” (Sinai in Exodus 24:13-16).

Encounter with the Lord

Moses spotted a bush that was burning but not being consumed. A JST edit in 3:2-2 makes the following changes: “And **again** the **angel presence** of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire, ~~out of~~ **in** the midst of a bush...And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not ~~burnt~~ **consumed.**” The insertion of “again” is intriguing because this is the first recorded instance of the Lord appearing to Moses (Moses 1 happened *after* the burning bush; see Moses 1:17). Had the Lord appeared to Moses previously? Or was there another time this particular sign was used? Secondly, it is not the angel (messenger) but the **presence** of the Lord that is in the flame and the bush, just as the presence of the Lord will be with Moses throughout the exodus experience. That presence is not just a fire that burns but an intensity that would consume (the story of Elijah and priests of Ba’al comes immediately to mind, where the fire of the Lord consumed the offering, the altar, the water, and even the dust on the ground; see 1 Kings 18:38). Yet the bush is miraculously not consumed, which is what catches Moses’ attention in the first place.

Calling his name twice from the bush (which is an indication of divine activity), the Lord instructed Moses to **remove his shoes** before approaching. This was a familiar habit for Moses because in Egypt, the custom was to go barefoot before the king (Zondervan 174). The Lord said that he had both “seen the affliction” of Israel and “heard their cry” (7) and promised to deliver them from the Egyptians and bring them to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (8). The land of Canaan is actually quite dry (though parts of it are very productive) so the expression probably reflects **the** blessings of the Lord more than geography. “Milk” comes from goats, and “**honey**” could be the syrup of grapes and dates as much as that produced by bees (Zondervan 174).

Moses’ concerns

At first the Lord said he was going to “come down to deliver” the children of Israel, but then he told Moses: “**I will send thee** unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people” (10). As anyone would be, Moses was incredulous, and specifically raises **five objections** that the Lord counters.

| Objection by Moses | Counter by the Lord |
|--|--|
| “Who am I?” (3:11) | “I will be with thee” (3:12) |
| “they shall say to me, What is his name?” (3:13) | “I am that I am” and promises of success (3:14-22) |
| “they will not believe me” (4:1) | Signs: rod into serpent, leprous hand healed, water into blood (4:2-9) |
| “I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (4:10) | “I will be with thy mouth” (4:12) |
| “send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send” (4:13, meaning, ‘please get someone else’) | “he [Aaron] shall be thy spokesman” (4:14-17) |

When Moses said he needed to know God’s name for the people to believe him, God replied, “**I am that I am**” (14). This Hebrew phrase can have many meanings, including ‘I am the one who is or ‘I will be who I will be.’ It is the source of the name YHWH which is written Jehovah in English because the Jews of the Middle Ages did not want to pronounce the name of God, so they applied the vowels from the word Adonai to YHWH, making Yahowah, which became Jehovah in William Tyndale’s translation of Exodus. YHWH’s meaning is uncertain, though it has at its root the verb ‘to be.’ Some believe it is only part of the full name, which thus might be ‘He who causes the hosts to be’ (YHWY seboath). However it might have been, it had something to do with being or bringing into being—creation (Zondervan 176).

The Lord gave Moses his message to Pharaoh: “The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God” (18). He has already told Moses that the final outcome was to leave Egypt completely and move to Canaan. So why the request to only be gone for a few days? Because the Lord knew Pharaoh would not even agree to this simple request, much less the full request to leave Egypt permanently, so this modest demand highlighted that stubbornness Moses faced.

His objections overcome, Moses took his leave of Jethro, packed up his wife and sons, and started toward Egypt.

Hardening hearts

Verse 4:21 is changed in the JST as follows:

“...wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: **and I will prosper thee**, but ~~I~~ **Pharaoh** will harden his heart, that he ~~shall~~ **will** not let the people go.” First, Moses is assured that his mission will be successful. To ‘prosper’ in the OT means to succeed or be profitable (TWOT 766). Second, this is the first instance in a series of changes where the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is attributed only to Pharaoh.

An ongoing theological challenge in the OT is for the Lord to give a sign or plague then for the Lord to harden Pharaoh’s heart. This does not mean that God somehow took away Pharaoh’s agency to react as he wanted but is an expression of an ancient Israelites world view—all outcomes are attributed to God. This has led to a difficulty felt in the commentary of many different people. Examples include an early patristic commentary by **Origen**, who concluded, “For if he is hardened by God, and commits sin in consequence of being so hardened, the cause of his sin is not himself. And if so, it will appear that Pharaoh does not possess freedom of will; and it will be maintained, as a consequence, that, agreeably to this illustration, neither do others who perish owe the cause of their destruction to the freedom of their own will.” This puzzling conundrum he solves in the end by dismissing it, arguing that “these and similar declarations seem to have no small influence in preventing very many from believing that every one is to be considered as having freedom over his own will, and in making it appear to be a consequence of the will of God whether a man is either saved or lost” and that basically Pharaoh was already of a “ruined nature” by his own previous actions, so God’s hardening of his heart was merely the “consequence of his evil nature” (*de Principiis*, 1:7-8). **Keil and Delitzsch** explain it saying, “the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was quite as much his own act as the decree of God” (Keil 1:294-295). And a **modern teacher** seems to verbally throw up his hands, declaring, “The theological conundrum posed by such interplay of

God’s acting and Pharaoh’s acting can only be resolved by accepting the record as it stands and by taking refuge in the omniscience and omnipotence of the God who planned and brought about His deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and in so doing also judge Pharaoh’s sinfulness” (MacArthur 88-89).

The **Joseph Smith Translation** consistently changes every occurrence of the Lord hardening Pharaoh’s heart to **Pharaoh hardening his own heart**. These corrections not only solve the theological problem but emphasize the correct principle of man’s agency. There are nineteen instances where Pharaoh’s heart is described as hardened (Exodus **4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17**). In each case where it could be interpreted that God is doing the hardening (bolded in the list above), the Prophet changed the verse so that it is not God but Pharaoh who must take responsibility for his own attitude—and in one case (10:1), for his influence on his servants. (Two other verses have similar changes—Deuteronomy 2:30 and Joshua 11:20; one Psalm is left unchanged—Psalm 105:25).

A bloody husband

Armed with his call and the Lord’s promises, Moses and his family **started their journey** to Egypt. Along the way, they spent the night at a resting place (not an “inn” as in the KJV but a known camping place with a well; TWOT 475; BDB 533), and a strange event is recorded (4:24-26). The record says that the Lord sought to **kill** Moses, so his wife, Zipporah, **circumcised** her son, touched Moses’ legs with it (“cast it at his feet;”), and twice called Moses a “bloody husband.” Notes one commentary: “This episode, possibly abridged from a fuller, clearer version, is extraordinary puzzling because the motive for God’s attack is unclear, the pronouns are equivocal, and Zipporah’s remarks are enigmatic” (JPS 113).

The JST adds some clarity (see the changes in the JST Appendix). This story is in stark contrast to what is related in the verses just preceding it. Moses went from experiencing great revelations in the presence of the Lord to falling under condemnation to the point where the Lord was about to kill him. The JST adds some clarity to the story, making explicit what

is implied from Zipporah's subsequent actions—that Moses was under this condemnation for not having circumcised his son, probably Eliezer (Exodus 4:20 says he already had “sons” and their names are given in Exodus 18:3-4; Gershom, the older son, had probably already been circumcised, but that the ordinance for the younger, Eliezer, had somehow been overlooked.). It is not recorded when he received this commandment or why it wasn't obeyed, but it was important enough to delay Moses' mission. For some reason not stated in the text, Moses was at this time unable to perform the ordinance himself, so his wife, Zipporah, took the sharp, flint stone and did it herself. (Perhaps Moses was deathly ill, which would account for the text saying the Lord's hand was upon him and about to kill him and why Zipporah had to perform the circumcision. Additionally, the LXX says that an angel appeared, seeking to kill him, which evokes the image of other scriptural incidents where angels threaten with unsheathed swords (e.g., Genesis 3:24; Numbers 22:23, 31; 1 Chronicles 21:16, 27). Zipporah's words to Moses sound condemning and accusatory here, and perhaps that is her tone (in contrast, the wording in the LXX is simply that “the blood of the circumcision of my son is staunch,” sounding more explanatory than condemnatory, as if she were just reporting back to Moses that the act is done.), but the term *bloody husband* (or *bridegroom of blood*, as many translations have it) is later used as an idiom to designate a recipient of the covenant of circumcision (Rasmussen 91).

The JST change that has Zipporah cast the stone knife at Moses' feet corrects the common KJV interpretation that she laid the circumcised foreskin at Moses' feet. The knife was probably Moses' in the first place and her returning it to him signifies that the task was done.

In verse 25, the KJV term *cut off the foreskin* is replaced by *circumcised*. The Hebrew term *cut off* is the same one used to make a covenant (literally, *cut a covenant*, e.g., Genesis 15:18) as well as for the consequence of someone who doesn't accept the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:14). Thus the

cutting off the foreskin is the sign of the covenant of circumcision, making the JST change entirely appropriate. The link to Genesis 17:14 also helps explain why Moses very life was endangered by his disobedience, since as the parent he was responsible for his yet unaccountable son's uncircumcised situation, and thus should be *cut off* from the people (Keil 1:298). This incident is preserved precisely because it serves as a memorable lesson to all Israelites—even the great Moses had to obey this law or risk God's punishment.

The JST adds that at the end of this story that Moses was ashamed of his sin “and hid his face from the Lord,” tying this story to the next verse, where it is evident that he and his family returned to Midian. Either Moses temporarily abandoned his mission or he was sent back by the Lord to wait and learn (or recover) after the circumcision incident. (The parallel to Joseph Smith giving the Book of Mormon manuscript to Martin Harris and losing the ability to translate for a season comes readily to mind.) Thus Aaron had to go all the way to Midian to find him (the JST clarifies that Aaron found Moses “in the mount where God appeared to him,” 27). With Aaron's support—represented by Aaron kissing Moses—Moses was ready to return. This time, however, he left his family with Jethro. He did not see his family again until the exodus was complete (18:1-6). It was probably during this period (between the first and second departures) that Moses had the vision that is recorded in Moses 1, reinforcing Moses' call and preparing him for the coming confrontations in Egypt.

Aaron and Moses speak to the elders

After Aaron joined him in Midian, Moses was prepared and they both returned to Egypt. Meeting with the elders of the Israelites, Moses told Aaron what to say and do and Aaron was the spokesman, relaying the message and giving the signs. The reaction of the people was belief and worshipping the Lord. Was Moses' timidity still a reflection of his objections? Over time, Aaron will speak and act less and Moses will step forward as the prophet and spokesman he was called to be.

CONFRONTATIONS WITH PHARAOH (5:1 – 11:10)

INTRODUCTION

Moses confronted Pharaoh and gave him ten signs or plagues. But in reality, Moses was not confronting Pharaoh as much as he was confronting the Egyptian's false system of worship—their pantheon of false gods that could not stand up against the powers of YHWH. Each plague was a direct confrontation to one of the leading Egyptian gods (see table, taken from MacArthur 92), concluding by demonstrating the Lord's power over life itself.

| Plague | Egyptian Deity (symbol) |
|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Water to blood | Hapi (running water) |
| 2. Frogs | Heqt (frog-goddess) |
| 3. Lice (mosquitoes) | Hathor / Nut |
| 4. Flies | Shu / Isis |
| 5. Diseased livestock | Apis (bull) |
| 6. Boils | Shekhmet |
| 7. Hail | Geb |
| 8. Locusts | Serapis |
| 9. Darkness | Ra |
| 10. Death of firstborn | Pharaoh |

The plagues naturally fall into three groups of three that follow a similar literary pattern. In each set, the first two plagues come after a warning. The first plague happens in the morning and Moses is given the charge to go speak to Pharaoh. The second plague also includes the instruction to go speak to Pharaoh but no time is specified. The third plague in each set comes without direct prior statement. Thus

we feel the tension building with each escalating set and we are baffled by Pharaoh's vacillating humility and anger, resulting in him not letting Israel go—until the climatic and singled-out tenth plague. Additionally, the first three arise from the river—water, frogs, and mosquitoes and are initially matched by the priests, though they cannot end the plagues as God does through Moses. The second set takes place on land—flies, animals, and boils. The last set hit the crops—hail and locusts destroy them, then darkness wilts them (Alexander 212).

Many have pointed out that the plagues have an obvious natural progression. If the Nile flooded, it would bring 'red earth', killing the fish and driving the frogs from the river. The pools from the flooding would breed mosquitoes, and the flies would spread disease, resulting in dead animals and boils (from bites) on people. Hail first ruined the early crops (flax and barley), the locusts stripped the later ones. With barren fields, a dust-laden wind would blow in from the east, bringing darkness to the land (Alexander 212). Of course, providing a naturalistic explanation for the plagues does not take away from the power of God to bring them upon the Egyptians—the Lord very often works by natural means. But it does speak to the fact that this combination of conditions is fairly unique to Egypt and thus couldn't have been easily fabricated by a later author unfamiliar with the culture, geography, climate, and history of Egypt.

COMMENTARY

BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW (5:1-23)

After consulting with the elders of the Israelites, Moses and Aaron gained an **audience with Pharaoh**, during which they declared, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a **feast** unto me in the **wilderness**" (5:1). Pharaoh's reaction was that he didn't know this god, so why should he obey, and he dismissed them. Then he turned around and told his taskmasters and officers to make the Hebrew slaves gather their own **straw** while making bricks but not decrease their output. This being nearly impossible, they were

punished and cried out at the unfairness of it, but the Egyptians mocked them, saying, "Ye are idle, ye are idle" (17). So the people complained to Moses and Aaron, and Moses implored the Lord, "why is it that thou hast sent me?" (22).

REASSURANCE (6:1-13)

Distressed that his actions seemed to have caused more harm than good, Moses seeks **reassurance** from the Lord, and gets it in 6:1-8. The promise is still that Pharaoh will let the people go—in fact,

“with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land” (1).

Verses 3-4 make it appear that before Moses, **no one knew God’s name YHWH**. Yet evidence in Genesis and latter-day revelation indicates that was not the case. Accordingly, the JST changes these verses to state the opposite, that his name was, in fact, known to the ancients—“I am the Lord God Almighty, the Lord Jehovah. And was not my name known unto them?”

In the KJV, the name “**Jehovah**” appears only **four** times—Exodus 6:3; Psalm 83:18; Isaiah 12:2; and 26:4 (in the JST, it is five times, adding Exodus 34:14). But in Hebrew, **YHWH** appears more than **6,000** times, starting as early as Genesis 2:4. Thus it was Jehovah (YHWH) that spoke to Adam, Abraham, Jacob, and more. In other words, telling Moses that his name was YHWH was all that was needed to identify him as the God of Moses’ fathers.

Note that the message to Israel was “I will rid you out of their bondage” (6), but the request to Pharaoh continued to be a request to go worship for a few days. Israel was also told, “I will take you to me for a **people**, and I will be to you a **God**” (7).

Moses tried to share this message of encouragement with Israel, but they “hearkened not unto Moses” (9) because of their great burdens. Thus when the Lord commanded Moses to return to Pharaoh, Moses had a little **pity-party**: “If the Israelites would not listen to me, how can it be that Pharaoh will listen to me, poor speaker that I am!” (NASB).

GENEALOGY (6:14-27)

The purpose of this genealogy is to establish the **family history of Moses and Aaron**. It starts with Jacob’s oldest two sons but then gets to Levi and gives no more sons after that but rather goes through Levi’s line to our two protagonists.

AARON A SPOKESMAN (6:28 – 7:7)

Significantly, the JST changes 6:30 (but not 6:12) so that Moses’ lips are not “**uncircumcised**” but “**stammering**,” and he is “slow of speech.” Perhaps Moses had some kind of speech impediment. More

likely, though, especially after his other encounter with Pharaoh, is that he may be referring to his decreased ability to speak Egyptian as fluently as he did when he was younger, after spending forty years among the Midianites (Student Manual 105).

The JST also changes 7:1-2 to clarify that Moses is not a “god” but a prophet, and Aaron not a “prophet” but a spokesman. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “prophet” also means ‘spokesman,’ so this change captures the sense of the passage—God speaks to Moses, Moses to Aaron, Aaron to Pharaoh.

The Lord again reassures Moses of the desired outcome. Unlike their other encounters, this one seems to ‘stick’ with Moses; from here forward, he no longer raises doubts about his own abilities or the final result. Rather, it says of him and Aaron, “as the Lord commanded them, so did they” (6).

STAFF INTO A SNAKE (7:8-13)

In their second encounter with Pharaoh, Moses was counseled by the Lord to use the same sign he had been given to convince the children of Israel when they first arrived—cast down his walking stick and the Lord would change it to a **serpent** (the word can also be a crocodile or even sea monster). So Aaron did that, but Egypt’s wise men were apparently able to duplicate it. Then Aaron’s snake swallowed theirs, showing the Lord’s superiority over their efforts. The snake (and the crocodile) were both symbols of power and authority in Egypt. Still, the miraculous show did nothing for Pharaoh, whose heart remained hardened.

(1) RIVER INTO BLOOD (7:14-25)

The first plague came “in the **morning**” (15) as Pharaoh went out to the river. The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to touch Aaron’s rod to the **waters** and all would be turned to **blood**—not just the Nile, but “all the waters” (20), including that stored in jars and jugs. The fish died and the smell was terrible.

It was Pharaoh’s job to maintain order and this wonder was an affront to his power and a calamity. The magicians were also able to turn water into blood (where did they find any water?) but could not

perform the reverse operation. Nevertheless, Pharaoh's heart remained hardened.

(2) FROGS (8:1-15)

The second even started with the Lord calling Moses to warn Pharaoh to let the people go or the **frogs** would come. And come they did, getting into their beds, ovens, and cooking areas. Again, the magicians were able to cause frogs to come but not get rid of the frogs. This time Pharaoh called for Moses and told him that if the frogs would go away, he would let the people go. Moses asked him when he wanted the frogs to leave, and Pharaoh answered, "Tomorrow" (10). So Moses and Aaron asked the Lord and the frogs died. But Pharaoh went back on his promise, again hardening his heart.

(3) LICE (8:16-19)

The third plague came without warning to Pharaoh. The Lord simply told Moses and Aaron to act, the dust became **lice** (or perhaps **mosquitoes** or **gnats**). The magicians attempted to duplicate this feat but could not, telling Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God" (19). But Pharaoh remained hardened still.

(4) FLIES (8:20-32)

Again in the morning, Moses is commanded to go to Pharaoh and ask him to let the people go or face "swarms" (21). The word "flies" is italicized because it's not in the text, thus the insect could be any number of things. A common thought is that it was a biting 'dog-fly,' which deposits its eggs in living flesh to give the hatching larvae food to eat. Fortunately for Israel, and apparently unlike the other plagues, the swarms did not go to Goshen. Again, Pharaoh called for Moses and said the people could offer sacrifices but not travel far away. Moses objected, saying their sacrifices would offend the Egyptians. Pharaoh said fine, "only ye shall not go very far away." Moses asked the Lord and the swarms left but Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

(5) DEAD LIVESTOCK (9:1-7)

The Lord sent Moses (no mention of Aaron this time) and told him to let the people go or face the death of

their animals. The animals died all through Egypt but not in Goshen, but still Pharaoh's heart was hard.

(6) BOILS (9:8-12)

Following the pattern, the sixth plague comes with no direct warning to Pharaoh. Moses is instructed to take ashes and "sprinkle it toward the heaven" (8). Pharaoh, at least, saw this happening but without explanation. The result was boils on man and beast. Not only could the magicians not duplicate this plague but it infected them so badly that they could not even stand. But Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

(7) HAIL (9:13-35)

For the third time, Moses approached Pharaoh in the morning, requesting to let the people go worship in the wilderness. The promised plague was "rain a very grievous hail" (18) such as had never been seen. Pharaoh was warned to get man and best indoors during the storm or "they shall die" (19). The record states that those "that feared the word of the Lord" (20) did so, but the rest left their cattle in the field. When the hail came, it was mixed "with fire" (24) and killed man, animals, and plants in its path—which did not include Goshen again.

This time Pharaoh appeared truly humbled, saying, "I have sinned this time: the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked" (27). Moses implored the Lord but not with any illusions at this point: "I know that ye will not fear the Lord God" (30).

(8) LOCUSTS (10:1-20)

Another visit and request of Pharaoh to let the people go resulted in the announcement of an eighth plague—locusts across the land, filling all their houses. Pharaoh remained stubborn but his servants begged him: "let the men go" (7). Pharaoh again called them back and said, "Go, serve the Lord your God" (8), but then tried to keep the numbers down by just letting the men go. Since that was the wrong answer, the locusts came, eating everything in their path. Pharaoh called them back and gave his now patterned response: "I have sinned" (16), so Moses again asked the Lord to get rid of the locusts but

when they were gone, Pharaoh's heart remained hard.

(9) DARKNESS (10:21-29)

The ninth again came with no warning to Pharaoh, but as Moses stretched out his staff, "thick darkness" (22) settled in, and for three days no one could move about. Pharaoh called for Moses and said they could go but not take their flocks but Moses reasoned, how could they offer sacrifices without their flocks? Angry and frustrated, Pharaoh sent Moses away, saying Moses would "see my face no more" (28). Moses agreed, but had one final thing to say before he left.

(10) DEATH OF FIRSTBORN (11:1-10)

The final plague is unique and breaks the pattern of three-threes, while completing the experience with the number ten, meaning perfection or completeness. The Lord warned Moses that "the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die" (5).

This encounter was Moses' last face-to-face interaction with Pharaoh, as he pronounced God's final judgment of the death of the firstborn of all Egypt. In the KJV, Moses appears upset: "And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger" (8). But in the JST, Moses was fully in control and it was Pharaoh that was angry: "...and they went out from Pharaoh, and he was in a great anger, and Pharaoh hardened his heart" (10).

FIRST PASSOVER (12:1-36)

INTRODUCTION

The history of the plagues leads up to the real purpose of the story—the institution of the

Passover, described in chapter 12. This is the first of Israel's three annual feasts.

COMMENTARY

The month **Abib** (later called Nissan) was in the spring and is designated as "the first month of the year to you" (1). Moses and Aaron were instructed to tell all of Israel to prepare by getting a **lamb** per household that was "without blemish, a male of the first year" (5). They were to keep (protect) it until the 14th of the month, at which point everyone was to kill their lambs. Taking some of the blood, they were told to paint it onto the side and upper door posts of their homes, then eat the lamb roasted on the fire, with unleavened bread and "bitter herbs" (8). They were to eat it ready to leave, with "loins girded," shoes on, staff in hand, and "in haste" (11). It is called "the Lord's **passover**" (11). The English word "passover" was invented by William Tyndale, to express the meaning of the Hebrew word *pesah*, which he understood to mean 'to pass or spring over.' Jewish scholars today believe that the word refers more to the sacrifice and perhaps has the sense of 'protective offering' (JPS 126). In either case, the children of Israel would be passed over by the destroying angel, while the firstborn of Egypt

would be killed, man and beast. The Lord's stated purpose in doing this was "against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment" (12). The blood on their doors would be "a token" that would allow the plague to skip them.

Though the killing of the firstborn was a one-time event, this was not to be a one-time remembrance, but "a **memorial**" kept "throughout your generations" (14). The instruction was to hold a seven-day feast each year at this same time, put all leaven out of their houses, and hold "an holy convocation" on the first and seventh days, eating a Passover meal on the seventh. The feast would be called "the feast of unleavened bread" (17). It was to start on the 14th day of the month and conclude on the 21st. When their children asked them why they kept this feast, they were to respond, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses" (27). Jewish families follow this pattern today by having

the youngest member of the family ask the question and an adult respond accordingly.

Doing what Moses and Aaron asked, the children of Israel were prepared for that night, though the Egyptians were not and “all the **firstborn**” in Egypt **died**, including Pharaoh’s oldest son, a prisoner’s son, and all firstborn cattle. The number of deaths must have been staggering, with every family being touched in some way. “And there was a **great cry** in Egypt” (30).

Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron in the middle of the night, saying simply, “Rise up, and **get you forth** from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said” (31). They were allowed to take everything, including flocks and herds. Egyptians couldn’t wait for them to leave, “that they might send them out of the land in haste” (33).

The JST changes verse 33 as follows: “And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, **for we be have found our first born** all dead ~~men~~ **therefore, get ye out of the land, lest we die also.**” Having lost their firstborn children and animals, the Egyptians cried out for the Israelites to leave. The change make it explicit that not only did they sorrow for their loss but they feared additional deaths if the God of Israel’s will was not met.

Packing quickly, the “**borrowed** of the Egyptians” (35) silver, gold, and clothing. It was supposed to be a loan because they would be back in a few days, according to the agreement they had with Pharaoh. As it turned out, they never returned and thus “spoiled the Egyptians” (36).

DEPARTURE (12:37-51)

COMMENTARY

The text records that there were “**six hundred thousand**” (37) men, not counting women and children (“women” added in the JST). That number may not be correct as it would represent two or three million people. The word “thousand” could simply mean ‘clan’ or ‘tribe,’ meaning there were 600 identifiable groups who left (Zondervan 210). Others point to the common practice of magnifying something by 10 among other ancient (and even modern) societies, meaning it could be 600 men, plus women and children (JPS 129).

It also says that it had been 430 years since Jacob had come down to Egypt with his family. Other

texts talk about four generations in Egypt (Genesis 15:16), which probably cannot equal 430 years. The LXX suggests that the 430 years includes the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Yet others feel that 430 years could be correct, given the time between the Hyksos (perhaps the people in charge when Joseph came to power) and the kings of the 19th Dynasty which could be the kings of the exodus.

The chapter ends with some rules about who could eat and with the key message: “the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies” (51).

FIRSTBORN SANCTIFIED (13:1-16)

COMMENTARY

Because of what happened in Egypt with the Lord saving all the firstborn of Israel, the Lord declared that the firstborn should be sanctified to him, meaning dedicated. Later this will be explained in

more detail, but here it is explained that the firstborn male should be redeemed (a ransom paid) in remembrance of this day.

Israel was also to remember this day with “sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes” (9). More details will be given

about this in Deuteronomy, but this is the origin of the tefillin (Greek phylacteries).

LED BY THE LORD (13:17 – 14:4)

COMMENTARY

The path of the exodus is a subject of much debate. The traditional route is reflected in the map in the back of the LDS Bible. But other routes are possible, especially considering that Moses was told to return with Israel to Horeb in Midian (not Sinai). This section gives some general directions, though, that help direct the beginning of the journey. They did not go up along the coast toward “the land of the Philistines” (13:17, an indication of a later editor identifying the land by its subsequent inhabitants) because they might see the warfare of that land and “return to Egypt” (13:17). Rather, God led them along “the way of the wilderness of the Red sea” (13:18). “Red” here and in subsequent verses is a mistranslation. The Hebrew is *yam sūp*, meaning ‘sea of reeds,’ just as Moses was placed among the reeds when he was born. “Red” came from the LXX translation of this verse, which Tyndale and subsequent translators picked up. Thus the exact location is not known, because this ‘sea of reeds’ cannot be identified with certainty. Anciently there were a number of seas or lakes in area between the arm of the Red

Sea on the west of Sinai (Gulf of Suez) and the Mediterranean Sea, where the Suez Canal is today (and where there was a smaller canal connecting the lakes at the time of Moses). It was likely one of these lakes they passed near and later through.

Fulfilling an ancient request, it says that “Moses took the bones of Joseph with him” (13:19), referring to the Joseph’s words in Genesis 50:25-26. They journeyed through Succoth, which is known, to Etham, which is not.

Even at this early stage, the Lord’s presence among Israel was clearly indicated with a visible symbol—“by day in a pillar of a cloud...and by night in a pillar of fire” (13:21). This is probably the same pillar, the darkness of the night making the fire visible.

The locations in the first part of chapter 14 are unknown but perhaps relate to the small canal along the lakes there east of the Delta area (Zondervan 214).

CROSSING THE SEA (14:5-31)

COMMENTARY

It may have been several days when it became clear to the Egyptians that the children of Israel were not returning. Or perhaps they grew impatient before the allotted time had ended. After all, Pharaoh had given them permission only to leave for a short time. “Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” (5), they asked. Afraid to lose their slave labor, Pharaoh took his chariots and armies and went out after them. Seeing them coming, the people “were sore afraid” (10) and complained that it

would be better to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the wilderness.

But Moses stood boldly: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord” (13). Following the Lord’s command (and perhaps remembering the promise he had received before coming to Egypt that God would make him “stronger than many waters” and that they would obey his command (Moses 1:25), Moses lifted up his staff, and the sea was driven back “by a strong east wind all that night” (21). Meanwhile, the Lord

protected them by moving the pillar of fire between them and the Egyptians while they crossed through the walls of water on dry ground.

When the Egyptians were finally able to pursue, they first broke their chariot wheels, bogging

them down in the middle of the miracle. Then the Lord commanded Moses to stretch out his hand, “that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians” (26), which he did, drowning the army.

SONGS OF MOSES AND MIRIAM (15:1-21)

COMMENTARY

Scholars consider this chapter to have some of the oldest text in the exodus account, preserved very close to their original form even as other texts went through later editing. The two songs reflect the joy of the people at this moment of their freedom. In the song, the Lord is lauded as “a man of war” (3) by his actions preserving Israel. He

controls the wind and the water and there is none like him. There is reference to his redemption of Israel in 16 (“thou hast purchased”).

Miriam, Moses’ sister, replied in kind with a shorter song (verse 21), echoing the same comments.

FED BY THE LORD (15:22 - 17:7)

INTRODUCTION

Fully freed from Egypt by the Lord’s power, Israel now had to find their way through the wilderness. They struggled to find drinkable water, adequate food, and more (four distinct episodes are given,

two focused on water, one on food, and one on enemy attack), but in each case the Lord cared for them, even in the midst of their murmuring.

COMMENTARY

Lack of water

The first challenge was that as they moved through “the wilderness of Shur” (15:22; “shur” means a defensive wall), there was no drinkable water. When they finally did find water at Marah (which means ‘bitter’), it was not fit for consumption. The people complained and Moses took the problem to the Lord. He was instructed to cut down a certain tree and cast it in the water, which subsequently made them sweet. With some chastisement, Moses told them to “diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God” (15:26) and he would keep them healthy. Thereafter, they went to Elim, probably Wadi Gharandel which even today has twelve springs of water (JPS 139).

Lack of food

About a month after leaving Egypt (“on the fifteenth day of the second month,” 16:1), the group moved south into “the wilderness of Sin” (16:1). The people complained that they ate better in slavery in Egypt than now. The Lord told Moses that he would “rain bread from heaven” (16:4) and gave specific instructions about how this bread was to be used, consumed, and stored, including collecting a double portion on the sixth day because they wouldn’t have any on the Sabbath. The point of this blessing was not only to feed them but to do it in a way that it would help Israel gain some discipline (“prove them, whether they will walk in my law,” 16:4).

Though not mentioned in the Lord’s directives, there must also have been a promise of meat in the evening because Moses and Aaron tell them

that is coming, and indeed quails flew in and “covered the camp” (16:13), giving them plenty of meat. The next morning, the mysterious bread was on the ground, “a small round thing” (16:14). Seeing it, the people said, ‘What is it?’ which phrase was transliterated into our Bibles as the name it was given—“manna” (16:15). So each day they received a portion of ‘what is it?’ which sustained them during their entire journey in the wilderness.

When the sixth day came, there was a double portion, as promised, but on the seventh day some still went out to get some but there was none to be found. Complaining about it to Moses, he reminded them of his instructions. This helped teach them of the sanctity and importance of the Sabbath in a very real and concrete way.

The Lord commanded Moses and Aaron to take some and put it in a pot as a “Testimony” (16:34). This manna never rotted for many generations. (An omer is equal to about a gallon; Zondervan 219).

Lack of water II

Continuing their journey, the people again complained for lack of water, a very real challenge in the deserts east of Egypt. Moses took the problem to the Lord again and was commanded smite the rock, which he did, producing water. Moses appropriately named the place with two names: “Massah, and Meribah” (17:7), which mean ‘test’ or ‘temptation’ and ‘contention’ respectively.

WAR WITH AMALEK (17:8-16)

COMMENTARY

The final episode was when Amalek attacked Israel in the wilderness. Moses told Joshua to organize an army and go fight them. He took his place on a tall hill where he could be seen by the army and held up his rod. The staff had been the source of many miracles and surely represented to the people God’s support. Moses’ hands could also have been raised in prayer, as was the custom in that day. As long as Moses’ arms were up, Joshua and the army prevailed, but when he tired and

dropped them, the army struggled against their enemy. So Aaron and Hur stood on either side and helped Moses hold up his arms for the full day, until Joshua was victorious.

In commemoration, Moses “built an altar” (17:15) and they named the place “Jehovah-missi” (17:15), meaning ‘Jehovah is my banner.’ Ancient armies often rallied under a banner; in Israel’s case, it was to be God himself.

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