

INTRODUCTION TO EXODUS



Taking its name from the Greek title of the book (“the way out”), the book of Exodus’ significance for interpreters of the Bible can hardly be overstated. Exodus is history, theology, law code, and worship manual all at once. Exodus tells the story of a God who enters human history, attends to the suffering of the Israelites, acts on their behalf for deliverance, and enables them to build a life worthy of covenant relationship with the divine. In short, Exodus is the story of how the LORD becomes Israel’s God, and how Israel becomes the LORD’s people.

Before this relationship can be finally established, the LORD must become known to Egypt and to Israel, slaver and enslaved (1:8-22). The primary means by which this knowledge will come is through these peoples’ respective leaders, Pharaoh and Moses. Moses first comes to know the LORD by name through a burning bush on God’s holy mountain, Sinai (3:1-4:17), and Pharaoh comes to know the LORD through signs of divine power after explicitly expressing his ignorance (5:2; 7:8-14:31). Roughly the first half of Exodus is dedicated to the conflict between these leaders’ growth in their knowledge of the LORD and how the LORD will act on behalf of his people (chs. 1-15). The climax of this conflict comes at the Sea of Reeds (traditionally the Red Sea), where the LORD miraculously saves his people Israel from the full array of Egyptian military might (14:1-31). Thus, Israel comes to know the LORD as a warrior and as their salvation (15:2-3).

The remainder of Exodus focuses on the nature of the covenant relationship between the LORD and Israel. Immediately following their salvation at the sea and prior to the establishment of the covenant (15:22-18:27), the Israelites learn to communicate with the LORD through their intercessory leader, Moses (e.g., 15:22-27), and they come to know the LORD as both a provider (e.g., 16:1-36) and a protector (17:8-16). Israel begins to shape their community as one characterized by fair judgment and laws, which is especially significant given the importance of law in their community (18:1-26). The covenant itself is not fixed until the people all arrive at Sinai (ch. 19), where Israel learns that if they will stay true to the LORD’s covenant by obeying the LORD’s laws, then Israel will be a “holy nation,” God’s “treasured possession” (19:5-6). In a terrifying encounter with God, they receive the Ten Commandments (19:16-20:21), the foundational laws by which they will live in community with God and each other. At Sinai, the setting for the remainder of the book, the people receive further instructions about how to live in community with one another (20:22-23:19),

they learn about how God must dwell among them (25:1–31:18), and they learn through hard experience that the covenant can be broken and, if the LORD wills it, reestablished with the people (32:1–35:1). Through this final episode of covenant-breaking, they come to know the LORD as “merciful and gracious . . . forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty” (34:6-7).

In its canonical context, Exodus sets the tone for the remainder of the Pentateuch, establishing patterns that will adhere throughout the Bible, most importantly the centrality of the covenant and the consequences of breaking relationship with the LORD. Historically, it represents the cultural heritage of a Judaism that longed for deliverance from foreign oppressors, and thus it may well have received its final form in the sixth to fifth centuries BCE, a time when Jews in captivity would have longed for just such divine action. Theologically, it speaks of a God who acts for those whom he loves, holding them to a standard of great holiness but also forgiving them when they transgress. In all these ways, the book is central to the overarching narrative of the Bible, the story of the LORD, his people, and the challenge of the divine-human relationship.

EXODUS

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. ⁷ But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

The Israelites Are Oppressed

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made

their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews^a you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

a Sam Gk Tg: Heb lacks to the Hebrews

1:1-22. Israel in Egypt. Before turning its attention to Moses, Exodus attends to the people of Israel as a whole. Originally a family, the Israelites have become a nation, and as such they conflict immediately with the regional superpower of their day, Egypt. In this introductory chapter, Pharaoh (who goes unnamed) has no counterpart in leadership among the Israelites, so the power he wields goes unchecked. **1-7** Although Exodus' scope and content differ considerably from Genesis, the first verses of Exodus establish an indelible connection with that prior history. Israelite multiplication is the fulfillment of divine mandates at creation (Gen 1:28) and after the flood (Gen 9:1, 7) and of divine promises delivered in the ancestral histories beginning with Abram (Gen 12:2; 18:18; 22:17; 46:3). **9-12** Pharaoh fears the growth of the Israelites, and he attempts to convince his people of the eventual military threat Israel represents. It is not until the Israelites grow even more numerous that the Egyptians explicitly share in Pharaoh's disgust (v. 12). **15** Although Pharaoh is not named in this account, the Hebrew midwives *Shiphrah* and *Puah* are. Whether they are Egyptians who serve the Hebrews or they are Hebrew themselves is unclear. **22** Although Pharaoh intends the Nile River to serve as an instrument of death, it will become a source of great pain for him (7:17) and a sign of God's power for Moses (4:9). Water generally provides a key thematic element for Israel, especially since it will be the conduit for Moses' deliverance (2:1-10) and the salvation of the entire nation (Exod 14).

Birth and Youth of Moses

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said.⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?”⁸ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother.⁹ Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it.¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,^a “because,” she said, “I drew him out^b of the water.”

Moses Flees to Midian

¹¹One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He

saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk.¹² He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.¹³ When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, “Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?”¹⁴ He answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely the thing is known.”¹⁵ When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.¹⁶ The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock.¹⁷ But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock.¹⁸ When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?”¹⁹ They said, “An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.”²⁰ He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.”²¹ Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage.²² She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, “I have been an alien^c residing in a foreign land.”

a Heb *Mosheh* *b* Heb *mashah* *c* Heb *ger*

2:1-25. Moses’ early life. Three small vignettes provide a brief biography of Moses prior to his encounter with God at Sinai. Raised among Egyptians (vv. 1-10), Moses is identified as a Hebrew (vv. 11-14), and finally settles and starts a family in Midian (vv. 15-25). In the first story, Moses is saved; in the final two, he acts as deliverer. **1** Moses’ tribal lineage is not insignificant, as the Levites would come to be identified by their ministerial role among the tribes (Exod 32:25-29; Deut 18:1-7). **3** The word for *basket* appears in Gen 6:14-9:18, where it is used to refer to Noah’s “ark.” In both instances, the word denotes a vessel through which deliverance comes. **6** Like the LORD in 2:24, Pharaoh’s daughter observes the cries of a Hebrew and has compassion. Pharaoh’s daughter is one of very few Egyptians in the Bible to be portrayed sympathetically. **7-10** Ironically, Pharaoh’s daughter subverts her father’s decree to kill the Hebrew children, even going so far as to bring the child into Pharaoh’s house (v. 10). Together with Shiphrah and Puah (1:15-22), she, Moses’ sister (here unnamed), and Moses’ mother show the ingenuity of women in the face of Pharaoh’s violent reaction to Israelite growth. **10** The name *Moses* is of Egyptian origin; here, however, it is connected to a Hebrew word to identify Moses with the people of Israel and foreshadow his role as one who delivers, or *dr(aws) out*, his fellow Hebrews from the water (Exod 14; cf. Isa 63:11). **11** To emphasize Moses’ ethnicity, the narrative repeats that the Israelites were *his people*. **17-21** The story of Moses’ meeting with his future wife at a well recalls the narratives of Gen 24:10-27 and 29:1-11 (cf. 1 Sam 9:3-12). **18** Elsewhere, *Reuel* is known as “Jethro” (Exod 3:1; 4:18; 18:1) or “Hobab” (Num 10:29; Judg 4:11).

²³After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

Moses at the Burning Bush

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have

come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” ¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹²He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

The Divine Name Revealed

¹³But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” ¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”^a He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD,^b the God of your ancestors, the

a Or I AM WHAT I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL

BE *b* The word “LORD” when spelled with capital

letters stands for the divine name, YHWH, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, “to be”

23-24 At this point in their history, the Israelites cry out generally and do not direct their requests for salvation to any particular deity. Yet God attends to their cry, a point of emphasis given the use of four verbs (*heard, remembered, looked upon, took notice*).

3:1–4:17. Moses’ call. In a divine manifestation at a burning bush on Mount Horeb (also called Sinai, for which see, e.g., 19:11), Moses is called by the LORD to bring the LORD’s people out of Egypt. Like many leaders in the Bible—especially prophets (e.g., Jer 1:6)—Moses objects, offering four reasons against his commission (Exod 3:11–4:11) before finally asking God to give the task to someone else (4:13). **3:2** *The angel of the LORD* proves indistinguishable from the LORD in most of the OT (Gen 16:7–13; 22:11; Num 22:22). The fire of the bush foreshadows the great fire on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:18) and the pillar of fire that will lead Israel in the wilderness (13:21–22). **6** As in 2:24, the connection to the ancestors *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* must be made explicit. Moses’ reaction to the LORD’s presence is not an inappropriate one, as gazing directly on the LORD’s image was potentially fatal (see 33:20). Nevertheless, Moses does come into God’s presence more directly than others (see Deut 5:24). **7–9** Before commanding Moses to bring the people out of Egypt, the LORD speaks to the situation of the Israelites, framing a promise to bring them into a new land *flowing with milk and honey* (i.e., abundant and fruitful, v. 8) between reminders that the Israelites’ cries of injustice have been heard (vv. 7, 9). **11–12** The first of Moses’ four objections centers on Moses’ identity, but God immediately redirects his attention to divine identity, which in turn leads to Moses’ second objection. **13–15** Moses’ second objection focuses on divine identity, inquiring into the name of the god with whom he is speaking as a means of convincing the Israelites. The name he is given, *I AM WHO I AM*, may also be translated “I will be who I will be.” The verb of being from which these translations are derived is closely related to the divine name YHWH.

God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

¹⁶Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt.

¹⁷I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' ¹⁸They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' ¹⁹I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.^a ²⁰So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go.

²¹I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; ²²each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians."

Moses' Miraculous Power

4 Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" ²The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." ³And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground,

and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. ⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail"—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—⁵"so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."

⁶Again, the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous,^b as white as snow. ⁷Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak"—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body—⁸"If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. ⁹If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

¹⁰But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." ¹¹Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" ¹²Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." ¹³But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." ¹⁴Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart

a Gk Vg; Heb *no, not by a mighty hand* *b* A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

21-22 The Israelites will not only leave Egypt, they will also despoil it (see 12:36), a radical reversal of Israelite fortunes along the lines of their surprising fertility (1:12, 20) and Moses' deliverance from the Nile (2:1-10). No matter how much one nation attempts to oppress Israel, God blesses Israel. **4:1-9** Moses' third objection to his role as the deliverer of Israel addresses the need for confirmation of Moses' divine mission. The question foreshadows the stubbornness of the Israelites after the events of the exodus (Exod 15:24; 16:2-3; Num 11:1-9). As with all of Moses' objections, the LORD addresses his concerns. Later in Exodus, Moses will use these signs to attempt to convince Pharaoh to let the people go, but he will be unsuccessful in the endeavor (7:10-13). **10-17** The exact nature of Moses' fourth and final objection is unclear, although it has been suggested that he had a speech impediment or could not speak well publicly. Whatever its nature, this protest angers the LORD, although once again allowances are made to address Moses' concerns.

will be glad. ¹⁵You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. ¹⁷Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

Moses Returns to Egypt

¹⁸Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, “Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go in peace.” ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead.” ²⁰So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand.

²¹And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. ²²Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. ²³I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.”

²⁴On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill

him. ²⁵But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’^a feet with it, and said, “Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” ²⁶So he let him alone. It was then she said, “A bridegroom of blood by circumcision.”

²⁷The LORD said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went; and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him. ²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. ³⁰Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped.

Bricks without Straw

5 Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’” ²But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go.” ³Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has

a Heb his

16 The transmission of the divine word from God to Moses to Aaron reflects a similar sort of transmission in prophetic literature (e.g., Deut 18:18; Jer 1:9). Exodus 7:1 makes this prophetic connection explicit.

4:18-31. Moses’ return to Egypt. In a confusing series of vignettes that provide a transition between Moses’ calling and his first encounter with Pharaoh, two reasons are given for why Moses is returning to Egypt (vv. 18-19), the LORD promises to make Pharaoh stubborn so that he will *not* let Israel go (v. 21), and the LORD tries to kill Moses (v. 24). **21** Although elsewhere in Exodus the LORD will provide reasons to make Pharaoh stubborn (e.g., 10:1), here none is given. While this offends modern theological sensibilities, it is unlikely that this expression of radical divine sovereignty would have bothered an ancient audience. **24-26** This mysterious scene may point to Moses’ failure to live up to the Israelite commitment to circumcision (see Gen 17:9-14), but certainty is impossible. **30-31** In spite of Moses’ fears that the people might not listen to him, they believe instantly when Aaron shares Moses’ reports and the signs are performed. Moreover, they bow down and worship—the first time they have done so in Exodus.

5:1-6:13. First audience with Pharaoh and its results. With little fanfare and immediately following the positive response of the Israelites, Moses and Aaron meet with Pharaoh. His response focuses especially on Israelite work, which creates conflict among the Israelite overseers, Moses and Aaron, and even God. Nevertheless, Moses’ mission remains consistent throughout this episode. **5:2** Pharaoh’s proclamation of ignorance (*I do not know the LORD*) is a self-indictment that the LORD will correct in due time (*You/the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD*, 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14; 14:4, 18). The knowledge of the LORD comprises a key theme in Exodus (see also 6:7; 10:2; 16:12; 29:46). **3** Moses and Aaron stay true to the words they were commanded to give to Pharaoh (3:18) with the exception of the final phrase regarding a deadly disease or violence.

revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword."⁴ But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!"⁵ Pharaoh continued, "Now they are more numerous than the people of the land^a and yet you want them to stop working!"⁶ That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors,⁷ "You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves."⁸ But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for they are lazy; that is why they cry, 'Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.'⁹ Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words."

¹⁰ So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw.'¹¹ Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least."¹² So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw.¹³ The taskmasters were urgent, saying, "Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw."¹⁴ And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, "Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?"

¹⁵ Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, "Why do you treat your servants like this?¹⁶ No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people."^b ¹⁷ He said, "You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice

to the LORD.'¹⁸ Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks."¹⁹ The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks."²⁰ As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses and Aaron who were waiting to meet them.²¹ They said to them, "The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us."

²² Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, "O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?²³ Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people."

Israel's Deliverance Assured

6 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land."

² God also spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD.³ I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty,^c but by my name 'The LORD'^d I did not make myself known to them.⁴ I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens.⁵ I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.⁶ Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.'⁷ I will take you as my

a Sam: Heb *The people of the land are now many*

b Gk Compare Syr Vg: Heb *beaten, and the sin of your*

people *c* Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

d Heb *YHWH*; see note at 3.15

15-23 Prior to this moment, Pharaoh's violent attempts to control the Israelites have backfired. Here, however, his steadfast refusal to supply straw for the bricks, while insisting on a consistent quota (v. 18), sows discord among the Israelites. Instead of responding to the overseers, Moses lodges a complaint against the LORD on his people's behalf (vv. 22-23), the first of several times that he will do so (Exod 15:24-25; Num 11:10-15). **6:1-9** God's response to Moses' complaint is to reassure both Moses and, through him, the people that deliverance is indeed coming. It is the LORD who will do this, a point Israel will know, just as Pharaoh will (v. 7). Just as Pharaoh's speech emphasized Israelite servitude, so the LORD's reassurance emphasizes the labor under which Israel was suffering (v. 6).

people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.”⁹ Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

¹⁰Then the LORD spoke to Moses, ¹¹“Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land.” ¹²But Moses spoke to the LORD, “The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?”^a ¹³Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

The Genealogy of Moses and Aaron

¹⁴The following are the heads of their ancestral houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. ¹⁵The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,^b the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon. ¹⁶The following are the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogies: Gershon,^c Kohath, and Merari, and the length of Levi’s life was one hundred thirty-seven years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon:^c Libni and Shimei, by their families. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred thirty-three years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their genealogies. ²⁰Amram married Jochebed his father’s sister and she bore him Aaron and Moses, and the length of Amram’s life was one

hundred thirty-seven years. ²¹The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, El-eazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. ²⁵Aaron’s son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the ancestral houses of the Levites by their families.

²⁶It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, “Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.” ²⁷It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, the same Moses and Aaron.

Moses and Aaron Obey God’s Commands

²⁸On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹he said to him, “I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I am speaking to you.” ³⁰But Moses said in the LORD’s presence, “Since I am a poor speaker,^d why would Pharaoh listen to me?”

7 The LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. ²You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company

^a Heb *me?* I am uncircumcised of lips ^b Or Saul ^c Also spelled Gershon; see 2.22 ^d Heb *am uncircumcised of lips*; see 6.12

6:14–7:7. The family of Moses and Aaron. A genealogy tracing Moses and Aaron to their Levite roots interrupts the wider narrative before the relationship between Moses, Aaron, and the LORD is reiterated and described in detail. **6:20** For the first time, the parents of Moses and Aaron, *Amram* and *Jochebed*, are named. Prior to this literary moment, knowledge of their names served little purpose. Here, they must be known to establish the line back to Levi. **23** Aaron’s sons *Nadab* and *Abihu* figure prominently in Leviticus when they bring “unholy fire” in a ritual act gone wrong (Lev 10:1-5). **24** The *Korahites* appear again in Num 16 in open revolt against Moses and Aaron, challenging the priestly claims of Aaron. **25** *Phinehas* plays a prominent role in preserving the sanctity of the Israelites in the incident at Beth-peor (Num 25:7-13). **26–27** The repetition in these verses of the material in vv. 10-13 strongly suggests this genealogy was an interpolation at some point in the development of this material. **7:3** The LORD again promises to *harden Pharaoh’s heart* (see 4:21), but in some contexts Pharaoh will harden his own heart (7:13-14; 8:15; 9:7, 34-35).

by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. ⁵The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from amongst them.” ⁶Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

Aaron's Miraculous Rod

⁸The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹“When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’” ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. ¹¹Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. ¹²Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. ¹³Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

The First Plague: Water Turned to Blood

¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out

to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. ¹⁶Say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, ‘Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness.’” But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷Thus says the LORD, “By this you shall know that I am the LORD.” See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. ¹⁸The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.” ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.’”

²⁰Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, ²¹and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. ²²But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and

5 Just as Pharaoh (7:17; 8:10, 22; 9:14) and Israel (6:7; 10:2; 16:12; 29:46) will know the great power of the LORD, so also will the Egyptians.

7:8–11:10. Signs, wonders, and the ten plagues. After a brief introductory sign by Aaron setting up a contest between the LORD and Pharaoh (7:8-13), Exodus describes a series of ten plagues whose explicit intention is to show God's power and increase the knowledge of the LORD. This purpose is underscored by the fact that Pharaoh is actually convinced to release the Israelites but is kept from doing so by the LORD (*I will harden Pharaoh's heart*, 7:3) in order to demonstrate his power. **7:8-13** Like Moses (4:1-5), Aaron also has a staff capable of divine power. Whereas Moses' staff was used to convince the people of Israel that he was indeed sent by God, Aaron's competes directly with Pharaoh's magicians. Remarkably, Pharaoh's sorcerers are able to recreate this wondrous sign (v. 11), a theme that will recur in the first three plagues. There, the limits of the sorcerers' power will become clear relative to the LORD's. **13** This is the second time Pharaoh refuses to let the people go (see 5:2). **14-25. Water to blood.** The first plague recalls Moses' third sign for the Israelites (4:9). Striking out against the Nile would have been a significant blow to Egyptians, for whom the river was a central feature of their society and economy. Surprisingly, only the LORD and Moses speak. Moses needs no spokesperson, and Pharaoh remains a silent, passive figure. **16** The purpose of *worship* in the release of Israel is stated once again, although here there is no time limit given as in 5:3, where a range of three days is given. **17** The signs are meant to increase knowledge of the LORD, and the staff (Moses', not Aaron's) through which they are accomplished features prominently once again. Staffs were significant symbols of power in ancient Egypt, as the pharaoh himself wielded two as symbols of his great power. **22-24** Pharaoh's magicians easily recreate this plague, so Pharaoh's heart *remain(s) hardened*. Pharaoh's recalcitrance is emphasized by the dual statements of vv. 22-23, and by his lack of concern at the hardship this creates for his people (v. 24).

he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart.²⁴ And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

²⁵ Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

The Second Plague: Frogs

8^a Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.² If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs.³ The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people,^b and into your ovens and your kneading bowls.⁴ The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.’”⁵ ^c And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’”⁶ So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.⁷ But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt.

⁸ Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, “Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”⁹ Moses said to Pharaoh, “Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.”¹⁰ And

he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God,¹¹ the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile.”¹² Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh.¹³ And the LORD did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.¹⁴ And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

The Third Plague: Gnats

¹⁶ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.’”¹⁷ And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.¹⁸ The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals.¹⁹ And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

The Fourth Plague: Flies

²⁰ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before

a Ch 7.26 in Heb *b* Gk: Heb *upon your people* *c* Ch 8.1 in Heb *d* Or *frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh*

8:1-15. Frogs. The first of four animal plagues, the plague of the frogs relates to the Nile like the first. Frogs, usually confined to their place in the river, cross their usual borders and go where they should not be. **7-8** As in 7:22, Pharaoh’s magicians reproduce the plague. On this occasion, however, Pharaoh asks for relief from Moses and Aaron. He acknowledges the LORD and offers a qualified release to the Israelites (i.e., they can go to offer sacrifices to the LORD). **10** The relief Moses and Aaron will provide has an explicit purpose: the knowledge that the LORD is singularly powerful, a claim that would have resonated in a society with a wide range of deities and divine figures, not least the pharaoh himself. **15** Pharaoh becomes stubborn here without direct action from the LORD (but see 9:12). **16-19. Gnats.** The second animal plague, gnats, originates not from the Nile, but from the land. As the plagues proceed, the LORD’s power over all creation becomes manifest. **19** For the first time in the plague narrative, the magicians are unable to reproduce the plague produced by Aaron’s staff. Their inability to do so convinces them that the power evidenced in the plagues is indeed divine, although they do not name the LORD. This is the first appearance in Exodus of *the finger of God*, which will appear again in 31:18. **20-32. Flies.** Whereas Pharaoh was unmoved by the previous plague, he moves considerably as a result

Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’²¹ For if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies; so also the land where they live.²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I the LORD am in this land.²³ Thus I will make a distinction^a between my people and your people. This sign shall appear tomorrow.”²⁴ The LORD did so, and great swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh and into his officials’ houses; in all of Egypt the land was ruined because of the flies.

²⁵ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.”²⁶ But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God are offensive to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us?²⁷ We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he commands us.”²⁸ So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness, provided you do not go very far away. Pray for me.”²⁹ Then Moses said, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; only do not let Pharaoh again deal falsely by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

³⁰ So Moses went out from Pharaoh and

prayed to the LORD.³¹ And the LORD did as Moses asked: he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; not one remained.³² But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and would not let the people go.

The Fifth Plague: Livestock Diseased

9 Then 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, so that they may worship me.’² For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, ³the hand of the LORD will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field: the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. ⁴But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites.”⁵ The LORD set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.”⁶ And on the next day the LORD did so; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not one died. ⁷Pharaoh inquired and found that not one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go.

The Sixth Plague: Boils

⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. ⁹It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.”¹⁰ So they took soot

a Gk Vg: Heb will set redemption

of the fourth plague: flies. The typical pattern established by the previous plagues changes in several ways, not least with the foregrounding of Moses rather than Aaron. **22-24** For the first time, the Israelites are explicitly excepted from the effect of a plague. This will become especially important in the final, climactic plague, the death of the firstborn (11:1-10; 12:29-36). **25-29** Pharaoh assents to the Israelite request to offer sacrifices, but only *within the land of Egypt* (v. 25). Parrying this argument, Moses promises to pray on Pharaoh’s behalf to remove the flies (v. 29). Moses’ concerns that he cannot speak well enough (4:10; 6:12) are conspicuously absent, as is Aaron himself. **9:1-7. Livestock disease.** The fifth plague strikes Egyptian livestock with mortal illness as the gravity of the plagues increases. Since wealth in the ancient world was often held in the size of one’s flock, this deals a serious blow to Egyptian affluence. **4** Following the pattern set by the fourth plague (8:22-23), Israelite livestock do not suffer as do the Egyptian livestock. **8-12. Boils.** As the severity of the plagues increases, the Egyptians and their animals are affected with bodily harm.

from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals. ¹¹ The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians. ¹² But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

The Seventh Plague: Thunder and Hail

¹³ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. ¹⁴ For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. ¹⁵ For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. ¹⁶ But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth. ¹⁷ You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go. ¹⁸ Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now. ¹⁹ Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.’” ²⁰ Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place. ²¹ Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field.

²² The LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.” ²³ Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; ²⁴ there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵ The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field. ²⁶ Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

²⁷ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸ Pray to the LORD! Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.” ²⁹ Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. ³⁰ But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.” ³¹ (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³² But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.) ³³ So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth. ³⁴ But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and

11 The magicians reenter the narrative, but only as passive victims of the plague and not as agents of their own special knowledge. **12** Strikingly, the LORD hardens Pharaoh’s heart for the first time, as promised (4:21; 7:3). Prior to this moment, Pharaoh hardened his own heart. **13-35. Thunder and hail.** The account of the seventh plague recapitulates the narrative so far, expressing through Moses the LORD’s exasperation with Pharaoh (vv. 16-17). The scale of the destruction in this plague is more expansive than any so far (v. 25), but Pharaoh’s inconsistent pattern of promise (vv. 27-28) and then failure to follow through continues (v. 35). **19-21** Surprisingly, the LORD suggests that action can be taken to protect Egyptian life and property. A distinction is made between Egyptians who *fear the word of the LORD* and those who do not. **27-28** Pharaoh condemns himself in the strongest terms yet, confessing his sin and narrating the conflict as one between himself and his people and the LORD. **34** Picking up on the language of vv. 27-28, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is described as *sin*.

hardened his heart, he and his officials.³⁵ So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

The Eighth Plague: Locusts

10 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them,² and that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them—so that you may know that I am the LORD.”

³ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me.⁴ For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country.⁵ They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the last remnant left you after the hail, and they shall devour every tree of yours that grows in the field.⁶ They shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your officials and of all the Egyptians—something that neither your parents nor your grandparents have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.’” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

⁷ Pharaoh’s officials said to him, “How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?”⁸ So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, worship the LORD your God! But which ones are to go?”⁹ Moses said, “We will go with our

young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the LORD’s festival to celebrate.”¹⁰ He said to them, “The LORD indeed will be with you, if ever I let your little ones go with you! Plainly, you have some evil purpose in mind.¹¹ No, never! Your men may go and worship the LORD, for that is what you are asking.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

¹² Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may come upon it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.”¹³ So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts.¹⁴ The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again.¹⁵ They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in the field, in all the land of Egypt.¹⁶ Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you.¹⁷ Do forgive my sin just this once, and pray to the LORD your God that at the least he remove this deadly thing from me.”¹⁸ So he went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD.¹⁹ The LORD changed the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea;²⁰ not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt.²⁰ But the LORD

a Or Sea of Reeds

10:1-20. Locusts. Closely tied to the hail (vv. 5, 15; see 9:25), a plague of locusts destroys all that is left to the Egyptians. Pharaoh relents in the face of intense internal pressure from his court officials (v. 7), but the LORD hardens his heart to demonstrate divine glory (vv. 1-2). **1-2** Verses 1-2 show the fullest statement of the pedagogical purpose in hardening Pharaoh’s heart. Pharaoh’s divinely ordained intransigence provides cause for signs and wonders so that future generations of Israelites may know the LORD. The theme of hardening recurs in v. 20 and thus frames this entire plague. Curiously, Pharaoh’s officials’ hearts are also said to be hardened, although the narrative does not manifest this fact (v. 7). **7-11** The extent of Egypt’s ruin prompts Pharaoh’s courtiers to pressure their leader to release the Israelites. Yet again, Pharaoh offers a qualified release, this time attempting to keep Israelite children in Egypt. **13** Power over the wind (see also v. 19) shows the LORD’s power over all creation. In 14:21, the LORD will employ similar power to part the Red Sea.

hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

The Ninth Plague: Darkness

²¹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt."²² So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days.²³ People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived.²⁴ Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you."²⁵ But Moses said, "You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God."²⁶ Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there."²⁷ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was unwilling to let them go.²⁸ Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die."²⁹ Moses said, "Just as you say! I will never see your face again."

Warning of the Final Plague

11 The LORD said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and

upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you away."² Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbor and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold."³ The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moses himself was a man of great importance in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's officials and in the sight of the people.

⁴ Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt.⁵ Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock.⁶ Then there will be a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again.⁷ But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites—not at people, not at animals—so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.⁸ Then all these officials of yours shall come down to me, and bow low to me, saying, 'Leave us, you and all the people who follow you.' After that I will leave." And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, in order that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."¹⁰ Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

21-29. Darkness. The ninth disaster plunges the ruined land of Egypt into deep darkness, and Pharaoh, desperate for relief, finally gives in. The ability to blot out the sun shows complete divine sovereignty over creation: as the LORD created the sun, so also can the LORD control its light and create darkness once more. **24** Pharaoh gives his customarily qualified assent, this time commanding the Israelites to leave their livestock behind. **28** Following the plague of darkness, Pharaoh makes a point to threaten Moses by means of the sense of sight. Moses, once concerned about his inability to speak (4:10; 6:12), turns this comment on its head to issue his own threat along the same lines. **11:1-10. Announcing despoliation and the death of the firstborn.** Prior to the climactic events of the tenth and final plague, the narrative slows down to announce that plague and the series of events that will both precede and follow it. The events announced here do not occur until 12:29-36. Israel not only escapes Egypt; it does so with great riches and honor. **3** Even as they depart, the Israelites and Moses are afforded great honor. Although Pharaoh's officials and the people of Egypt respect the people of Israel greatly, Pharaoh himself is incapable of this and is thus left off the list. **7** This *distinction* provides the culmination of a series of distinctions in the plagues themselves (8:22-23; 9:4). The differences between Israel and the nations are an important theme in the OT generally, so it is important that this difference is expressed at this seminal moment. **8** Moses' reaction to Pharaoh here is unique. Elsewhere the dialogue he uses expresses his anger, but here the reader is told that Moses was angry.