

COMMENTARY ON EXODUS (part 1)

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The Book of Exodus contains the remarkable story of how God raised up a man, Moses, and used him to deliver His people out of slavery in Egypt and how they began the journey that took them to the land promised by Him to their ancestors.

It then reveals how God made a unique covenant with them at Sinai, and established them as His chosen people, with His earthly Dwellingplace among them.

It will be noted that Exodus demands, and depends on, a knowledge of Genesis. It is a knowledge of the experiences of the patriarchs, to say nothing of the earlier history, that illuminates and makes sense of Exodus.

Exodus Continues The Story of Genesis.

Genesis has explained the origin of the people who went down into Egypt, and the promises that they had received from God. Exodus continues the story. Genesis begins with one man. Exodus begins with seventy men, a number signifying divine perfection intensified. But while Exodus 1 covers centuries of history during which Israel develop and then face oppression, and Exodus 2 the life of Moses up to the burning bush, (said to be 'eighty years' - 7.7), the remainder of Exodus covers the two years that complete and follow Moses life in Midian during which he inflicts under God's hand the ten plagues on Egypt, leads the people out to safety, establishes the covenant of Mount Sinai and erects the Dwellingplace of Yahweh.

There are interesting comparisons with Genesis. Genesis 1-11 covered hundreds of years and prepared the way for the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and God at work in them, Exodus 1 covers hundreds of years and prepares the way for Moses and God at work through him. It is not history that is prominent here but the activity of God in history. Until God begins to act history is simply summarised and preparatory.

But there is also a comparison in the detail. Genesis was the book of beginnings. Exodus is the book of a new beginning. In Genesis 3 man had been sentenced to hard toil because of sin, the same occurs to Israel in Exodus 1. They too are subjected to hard toil, for they should by this time not have been in Egypt. There is thus the same example of disobedience followed by hard toil. The sin of man leads to the building of cities in Genesis 4.17; 11.1-9, the sign of man's independence of and rebellion against God. In Exodus 1 the children of Israel are set to the task of building cities. Cities are ever in Scripture a picture of man setting himself up against God. Stress is laid on the fact that all men die, 'And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation' (1.6 compare Genesis 5). The nations expand and flourish in Genesis 10, the same occurs to Israel in Exodus 1. In both cases there is phenomenal expansion ready for the purposes of God to begin. For God's purposes will flourish in spite of man's sin. God raised up Abraham in Genesis 11-12, and here in Exodus 2 God raises up Moses. Noah was saved by an 'ark' which had been waterproofed in Genesis 6-8 and here in Exodus 2.3 the baby Moses is saved in an ark that has been waterproofed. Genesis describes a murderer who fled to the land of wandering from the face of Yahweh. Exodus 2 describes another murderer who fled into the wilderness, this time from before the face of Pharaoh. Genesis 3 describes God's triumph over the snake and his promise that man will defeat the snake. One of the signs that Moses has to give to Israel and Pharaoh is of his triumph over a snake through the power of Yahweh (Exodus 4.4), and Yahweh's power over the Egyptian snakes. In Genesis 4 God puts a mark on Cain. The second sign to Moses is that he is marked with a loathsome skin disease on his hand, he is marked as a murderer, but in his case the mark is removed (Exodus 4.6-7) in order to indicate that Yahweh is with his hand. There is thus a similar pattern, which we can hardly fail

to see as deliberate, revealing sin, punishment, rebellion, and deliverance.

The Overall Sevenfold Structure of Exodus.

The book is composed on a sevenfold structure:

- 1). The condition of Israel and preparation of Moses ready for Yahweh's assault on Egypt because of the enslaving of His people (1-4).
- 2). Their covenant God acts powerfully to deliver Israel from Egypt (5-12).
- 3). The journey of His redeemed people to Mount Sinai (12-18).
- 4). The giving of the covenant (19-24).
- 5). Moses' period in Mount Sinai while the people wait below, during which he is given instruction concerning the Tabernacle and the Priesthood (25-31).
- 6). The breaking of the new covenant and its renewal (32-34).
- 7). The setting up of the Tabernacle (mishkan - Dwellingplace) and its commissioning by the descent of the glory of Yahweh (35-40).

We have here a series of contrasts. In (1) the people are enslaved under Pharaoh, in (7) they are established as Yahweh's people under Yahweh. In (2) Yahweh powerfully delivers His people revealing His faithfulness, in (6) His people fail in their response and reveal their faithlessness. In (3) we have progress towards the making of the covenant by Yahweh with His people in which first foundations are laid down, and in (5) we have the means provided by which they can maintain their covenant relationship with Yahweh. In (4), central to all, is the Covenant itself.

We may differ as to where each section actually commences and finishes but the overall pattern is clear. These sections reveal especially His patience and longsuffering, His power and might, His tenderness and love, His trustworthiness and faithfulness, His desire for fellowship with His people, His forgiveness and mercy, and His assured triumph in the end. The book can be summed up in the words of 19.4-6: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be My own possession from among all peoples: for all the earth is mine: and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation".

Exodus Is Preparing For The Books That Follow.

It should be clear to all that Exodus could not stand on its own. It requires Genesis to provide the explanation of who these people were, and it requires Leviticus and Numbers in order to explain the details of the ceremonial law and the movement on to Canaan. Without Leviticus we would not know what happened in the Tabernacle (the Dwellingplace). Without Numbers we would not know how they reached Canaan. And this last is the aim which is in mind throughout the book (3.17; 6.8; 23.20 ff; 32.34; 33.1 ff ; 33.12 ff ; 34.9 ff) and is required by the covenant legislation (21.1 ff; 34.11 ff).

Did The Exodus Happen?

That the Exodus happened we can be in no doubt. Its centrality in Israel's future faith confirms it. This is demonstrated by its regular representation in the Psalms as something to be sung about and seen as central to their worship, especially as related to the Reed Sea deliverance and Mount Sinai. And no nation of antiquity would have invented a story so demeaning to itself. When nations invented stories it was in order to glorify themselves not in order to demean themselves.

The book reveals a nation of slaves (in the ancient sense of the term), and a man trained up in

Egypt in administration and leadership, gaining knowledge of the wilderness in exile, who tackles the mighty Egyptian king face to face and outfaces him, leads a conglomerate people made up of many nations, but whose core is the Israelites, out of Egypt and through the wilderness, and establishes a basis of nationhood for them in the Covenant of the Ten Commandments, the Book of the Covenant and the laws that follow.

He could not do this without appealing to their general and religious background and there can be no doubt that he would call on their ancient records as the basis for their faith. It was therefore extremely likely, even from a human point of view, that he would take those records and incorporate them in some kind of continual narrative (if that had not already been done) so that the large number of foreign elements within the group could be made familiar with the background and ethos of this people with whom they had joined themselves in the Exodus. They needed to be established in the traditions of Israel. As also did Israel itself need to be reminded of its own traditions. This was the final origin of the Book of Genesis which was based on those ancient records (apart possibly from a few later scribal amendments which were a quite normal procedure). Exodus continues the story.

The word 'exodus' is Greek meaning 'a going out, departure' and was not the original title of the book. It appears in the LXX version of Exodus 19.1.

The Authorship of the Book.

There is a continuous testimony throughout history that the book was mainly the work of Moses. No one will deny that other Old Testament books assert the essential Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch demonstrating the strong tradition supporting the claim (see for example Joshua 8.31, 32; 23.6; 1 Kings 2.3; 2 Kings 14.6; 23.25; 2 Chronicles 23.18; 25.4; 34.14; 35.12; Ezra 3.2; 6.18; Nehemiah 8.1, 14; 13.1; Daniel 9.11, 13; Malachi 4.4). And this list only includes actual references to his writing. To list all the reference referring to God's command given through Moses would require a number of pages. Very important among the above is Joshua 8.31-32 which testifies to the fact that what Joshua had written on the stones came from the written law of Moses. Accepting that Joshua did write on those stones (and we have no reason for doubting it) this takes the testimony back to eyewitnesses. Through all this period there is no hint that it was written by anyone else. More importantly Jesus Christ Himself saw the Pentateuch as the writings of Moses (John 5.46-47), as without error (Matthew 5.17-18), and indicated Moses' connection with Deuteronomy (Matt. 19.7-8; Mark 10.3-5). See also Peter (Acts 3.22), Stephen (Acts 7.37-38), Paul (Romans 10.19; 1 Corinthians 9.9), and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 10.28).

Thus the weight of all the earliest evidence, and of the Scriptural evidence, is that Moses was its source. His 'authorship' is therefore something that has to be disproved for those disinclined to accept it, rather than something that has to be proved.

Of course when we speak of Mosaic authorship we must understand what is being claimed. It is not necessarily believed that Moses wrote every word of the book in his own hand, for it would be quite in accordance with the day for him to use a scribe. Mosaic authorship instead is intended to indicate that Moses is the source of the information in it, although the actual recording would have been done by the scribe that he chose, with the finalising possibly done after his death when there was no longer the living voice. This was possibly done by Joshua, although it may have been Eliezer or some other godly scribe unknown to us who was Moses' confidant. But that Moses insisted on putting things in writing comes out throughout the Pentateuch (Exodus 17.14; 24.4-8; 34.27; Numbers 33.1, 2; Deuteronomy 31.9, 22) and the number of times that we are told 'Yahweh said to Moses' (or the equivalent) are legion. And we must remember that Israel's most sacred relic was the Ark of the Book (Testimony).

It is frankly quite difficult to believe that having been told to record the details of the battle with Amalek (17.14) Moses would not then consider recording the details of other equally traumatic events. Indeed he had probably already recorded the incident of the Reed Sea in his song of chapter 15. And we certainly learn that he had a ready pen (24.4-8; 34.27; Numbers 33.1, 2; Deuteronomy 31.9, 22).

The problem with the Pentateuch was that because of the effectiveness of its message and its sacred significance it was preserved and used continually on and off by the people. Had it been lost and only come to notice through being discovered in the ruins of the Temple what reverence would have been paid to it by scholars. How much more carefully they would have treated its contents. How much more credence it would have been given.

For the first thing we must dispose of here is the idea that used to be prevalent that the Pentateuch is the product of a number of documents somehow joined together. This idea, which prevailed for so long on doubtful grounds, is completely demolished when we study the Book. For as the commentary will make clear, it was written according to a distinct pattern which if it came from joining together different authors would have required a genius beyond telling. There is a constant pattern all the way through which demands unity of authorship (study Exodus and Numbers yourself carefully with our commentaries and see whether you can honestly deny it). It will be noted that those who claim disparate authorship never consider the chiasmic patterns that clearly underlie Exodus and Numbers especially. In these patterns certain things are often spoken of and then their consequences related in the reverse order. But the commentary must speak for itself on this.

That is not to deny that there are traces of sources. Moses would have written down parts of the covenant even as they were received, for God had already emphasise the importance of memorial writing at the defeat of Amalek in Exodus 17, and in those days that was the way with covenants and their surrounding history. Indeed there is good reason to believe that Genesis was mainly composed of written records made to record covenant situations (why else a covenant or saying with every chapter?). But with a mixed multitude of various origins making up the people (Exodus 12.38), and the likelihood of their being spread out once they were in the land, Moses would have been criminally negligent not to ensure that the details of the covenant were written down, and that includes far more than the book of the covenant which was hardly sufficient. Of course there may have been occasional odd notes of explanation tacked on later, and there may have been an updating of the grammar to make the ancient Hebrew understandable (such as an English copyist might do to Chaucer), but that is not to get away from essential Mosaic authorship on the terms described above.

The sacredness of the text would have ensured that such upgrading was done with great care, but in the end the requirement for it to be understood would presumably have prevailed. However, even then some especially sacred parts would be left untouched. (We can compare the initial upgrading of the King James Version in the English speaking world, although the comparison fails because in this case we have ancient texts in the original languages which could be used to correct it. Unlike the way that the Law of Moses would have been seen, the King James version was only one of many, even though an important one for the UK and the US). Thus it would give the appearance etymologically and grammatically of containing old and new, which it undoubtedly did. Indeed it is precisely what we would expect of so ancient and sacred a book which in the good times was in regular use. But none of this is evidence of its essentially Mosaic content being open to doubt, and the chiasmic constructions (which such updatings would not have affected) is evidence enough for its essential oneness. But we need not think that these constructions were artificial. They were a dynamic consequence of their way of thinking. Every statement had to have its parallel or contrast.

The Date of the Exodus

There are two centuries which are mooted as being the date of the Exodus, some favour the 15th century BC and some the 13th. Archaeological evidence is cited for both and dependent on the view taken will depend the name of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The problem is that during that period it was the custom in Egypt not to connect the name of the Pharaoh with his title and we thus have no clue in the Book of Exodus itself as to which Pharaoh it was. Points arising with regard to this will be dealt with in context.

We will now examine the Biblical criteria with regard to this, but as we do so we must remember that the ancients used numbers far differently than we do. They did not have a fixation with chronology and the reconciling of time periods, they used numbers to indicate facts in a different way. Their chronology was based on moon periods, with twelve or thirteen of these making up a year as was necessary to keep the seasons in synchronisation, and in the early days they would not necessarily have had a long term calendar or recognised overall year system, rather linking the passing of years to different important events of the not too distant past (see Amos 1.1). It was the coming of the new moon in spring that determined their festal 'year' from Passover to Tabernacles. We must beware therefore of taking numbers too literally without asking ourselves whether they in fact have another and deeper meaning (as the number seven almost always does).

In Genesis 15.13 it was predicted that Abraham's descendants would be 'a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years.' But 'four hundred years' is clearly a round number and may well have been intended merely to indicate 'four generations' (as Genesis 15.16 suggest). In those days of patriarchal longevity a generation may well have been described in terms of 'one hundred years', especially in view of the fact that Isaac was born when Abraham was 'one hundred'. This is supported by the fact that it is said in the same context as the four hundred years that they will return 'in the fourth generation' (Genesis 15.16). This suggests that 'one hundred years' is intended here to represent 'a generation'. The actual length of generations would apparently have been somewhat different from later.

More indicative at first sight appears to be Exodus 12.41. 'Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, which they sojourned in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it happened at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it happened, that all the hosts of Yahweh went out from the land of Egypt.' But the selfsame day from what? Presumably from the entry into Egypt.

However this figure may be based on the 'four hundred years' of Genesis 15.13 with a further period added, thirty years, to reflect a complete and exact period (three intensified), to cover the working out of the deliverance from Egypt. They looked at and interpreted numbers far differently from us. Most did not use numbers regularly in their daily lives, and they did not have a fixation with numerical exactness. The statement about the self-same day may thus simply be saying that it happened exactly as God had planned.

This is further complicated by the fact that here the LXX has a different reading for it reads 'in Egypt and in Canaan'. It is possible that this was the original text but it looks far more like an attempt to solve a difficulty caused by the fact that Exodus 6.16-20 does reveal four generations from Levi to Moses (compare Leviticus 10.4 also Numbers 26.5-9 of Korah. 1 Chronicles 6.1-3 is taken from here). But note for example that there were a greater number of generations from Ephraim to Joshua (1 Chronicles 7.20-27).

We now know in fact that in these genealogies it was often only considered necessary to put in the important names so that generations could be omitted with no difficulty and 'begat' means 'was the ancestor of' and 'son of' means 'the descendant of'. This is archaeologically evidenced again and again in different parts of the ancient world. Indeed four generations may have been

deliberately selected to bring out the fact that they were in a foreign land, for four is the number indicating the world outside the covenant (consider four rivers outside Eden (Genesis 2), four kings from foreign parts against Abraham (Genesis 14), four beasts representing world empires (Daniel 2 and 7) and so on). Amram and Yochebed may have been only 'descendants of' Kohath or they may even have been ancestors of Moses and not his direct father and mother.

So we must be careful about attempting to apply our criteria to figures in the Old Testament.

A similar thing can be said about the seemingly exact 'four hundred and eighty years' in 1 Kings 6.1. This may well have been a way of indicating 'twelve generations' taking a generation as forty years (it is used a few hundred years later when life spans had decreased). Its intention may have been, for example, to signify that there had been twelve high priests between Aaron and the building of the temple. Thus the method of adding the four hundred and eighty here to the four hundred and thirty in Exodus 12.41 may well only produce spurious results as neither number is certain as to meaning and may be based on different criteria. If, for example, the average generation after the time of Moses was actually 25 years, a reasonable assumption, 'the four hundred and eighty years' would represent three hundred actual years.

The truth is thus that if we are to date the Exodus we must do so by external means. And this we do not intend to attempt. It requires a great amount of uncertain and complicated detail, is adequately done elsewhere, is not conclusive and diverts from our main purpose, the meaning of the text. (But see for this [Date of the Exodus](#)) for a preliminary (if unsatisfactory to those who want certainty) survey.

THE COMMENTARY

Chapter 1. The Sufferings of Israel (Exodus 1.1-22).

This chapter is the background to what follows and can be analysed thus:

- a The growth of the children of Israel (1.1-1.5).
- b Pharaoh fears that they will multiply and puts them to hard labour (1.6-11).
- b The children of Israel multiply and are put to hard service (1.12-14).
- a Pharaoh seeks to destroy the growth of Israel through its midwives (1.15-22).

Note how 'a' contrasts with its parallel 'a', while 'b' and 'b' demonstrate an ongoing situation.

The chapter describes briefly how the children of Israel arrived in Egypt and began to multiply. Then follows the suspicion that resulted because of the threat that Pharaoh felt that they might pose to Egypt in case of war, resulting in their being put to hard labour. But in spite of the afflictions they continued to multiply so that the Egyptians then set them to hard service. And finally the Pharaoh decided that measures must be taken to curtail their growth and called on first the midwives, and then the people of Egypt, to arrange for the slaughter of their male children.

The Growth of the People of Israel (1.1-1.5).

Note the balanced pattern of the section.

- a The names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt (1a)
- b Every man and his household came with Jacob (1b).

- c Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (2).
- d Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin (3).
- c Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher (4).
- b All the souls that were come out of the loins of Jacob (5a).
- a For Joseph was in Egypt already (5b).

Note how in 'a' the sons of Israel in Canaan are paralleled with the son of Israel in Egypt. In 'b' the households make up the household of Jacob, while in the parallel the major heads of the households all come from the loins of Jacob

1.1 'Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt, every man and his household came with Jacob.'

This verse continues on the narrative of Genesis. It takes up where Genesis left off, summarising what has gone before in a few verses. Those who entered Egypt with Jacob were his eleven sons (excluding Joseph who was already in Egypt) and their 'households'. The households would include servants and retainers. Thus they may well have numbered in all a few thousand. We can compare how Abraham's household contained 318 fighting men (Genesis 14.14). All would be seen as 'children of Israel'.

Jacob had come back from Paddan Aram with considerable resources and probably many servants, and these had been joined with the family tribe of Abraham and Isaac. Thus they were at some stage fairly numerous. On the other hand famine may have reduced their numbers somewhat. But they would nevertheless be a strong group, not just a few semi-nomads.

1.2-5 'Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls, and Joseph was in Egypt already.'

The names of Jacob/Israel's sons are now listed. This statement assumes the existence of material such as we find in Genesis chapter 46.1-27 where the 'seventy' is explained. We note, however, that here the sons are placed in a different order with the sons of the full wives placed before the sons of the slave wives.

'All that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls.' The number seventy indicates divine completeness, being an intensification of seven (see also Deuteronomy 10.22). But here Jacob, in contrast with Genesis 46, is seemingly not included in the seventy, unless he can be seen as being in his own loins, demonstrating again that 'the seventy' is an artificially contrived figure intended to denote this divine completeness, as we saw on Genesis 46. It is conveying an idea, and is not intended to be seen as a mathematical calculation. The fact is that neither reader nor writer were interested in how many there were. They are interested in the number in view of what it conveyed, the divine completeness of the group. It is saying that Jacob came into Egypt in divine completeness. (It is not to be seen as 'incorrect'. It is in fact more correct to the ancient innumerate mind than a mathematical figure would be. It certified the divine perfection of the group entering Egypt).

We note also that women, children and servants were mainly ignored. Everything centred on Jacob and his male seed for they were the heads of their households. This was the foundation on which Israel was to be built, but all, males, women, children and servants would be a part of 'the children of Israel, as they had been of their 'father' Abraham.

The People Multiply And Are Put To Hard Labour (1.6-12).

The careful patterning continues:

- a Joseph dies and all his generation (6).
- b The children of Israel are fruitful and multiply (7).
- c A new king arises who does not know Joseph (8).
- d He calls on his people to deal wisely with the children of Israel (9-10).
- c They set over them taskmasters and make them do building work (11).
- b The numbers of the children of Israel continue to grow (12a).
- a The Egyptians are disquieted because of the children of Israel (12b).

Note how in 'a' we have the death of Joseph, which is paralleled by the resulting Egyptian disquiet. In 'b' the children of Israel multiply, and in the parallel their numbers continue to grow. In 'c' the new king arises who did not know Joseph, and in the parallel his actions in setting taskmasters over them is described. Central to the whole is his concern for his people's welfare and for the threat in their midst.

1.6 'And Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation.'

So quickly do we pass over the lives of the children of Israel and their households in Egypt. Joseph died, his brothers died, all that generation died one by one. Time is passing. Women, children and servants are included in 'all that generation. During that time they had no doubt as a whole prospered and enjoyed great freedoms. But they all died. We can compare this emphasis here with Genesis 5 and 11, where it is continually stressed, 'and he died'. Death is writ large in human existence in the Scriptures. It was the result of the Fall, and it still applied to all.

1.7 'And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and expanded exceedingly greatly, and the land was filled with them.'

However, although death continued, God was with them and conditions were ripe for their expansion. All they required was provided for them while Joseph was alive and by the time he died they were well established and not needing favours. As a result of his wisdom they were mainly sited in the land of Goshen in the delta region where many Semites could be found who had sought shelter in Egypt. The result was their great expansion in numbers both by natural birth and by taking on further retainers and household servants. So much so that the land was 'filled with them'. They seemed to be everywhere. God was prospering them.

We can compare here the picture in Genesis 10 which was also a picture of expansion following deaths. That too is a picture of huge expansion. Life triumphed over death. God's power counteracted the power of the grave as His purposes moved forward.

'The children of Israel.' This term is now gradually crystallising to signify them as a people, but always contains within it the reminder of their 'descent' or close family connection with Jacob/Israel, who represented the fathers to whom the covenant promises were given. They were the 'children' of the covenants God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But this does not indicate that they were literally all descended directly from Jacob/Israel. They were 'children' in that they were members of his clan, and the expression incorporated all who joined the households.

Note the multiplication of words to describe their increase. It was clearly well beyond the ordinary. 'Fruitful -- increased abundantly -- multiplied -- expanded exceedingly greatly -- the land was filled'.

This being so we must ask why they did not now return to their homeland. The visit to Egypt

had been in order to escape famine, and once Joseph was dead they had no reason for staying there. Certainly Joseph had expected them to return (Genesis 50.24-25). But the pleasures and ease of Egypt seemingly seemed to offer more than the land which had been promised to their forefathers, and they remained in Egypt. It was not that they were not warned. God had already pointed out that in Egypt only suffering awaited (Genesis 15.13-14), and we might therefore have expected them to take heed. But they did not do so, and thus by their dilatoriness ensured the fulfilment of the prophecy.

We see here the two sides of God's sovereignty. On the one hand the quiet call to them based on His promises to Abraham was to trust God and go home, on the other was the fact that God had already prophesied that they would not do so (Genesis 15.13-14). The whole history of salvation is cluttered with similar failures of God's people to obey Him, and His merciful and final triumph over their disobedience as He patiently brings about His will. It is all a part of His sovereign working. His people are foolish and disobedient and He regularly has to drag them kicking and screaming into salvation.

1.8 'Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.'

Once Joseph died the influence of what he was would gradually decrease until eventually it would cease altogether. This was especially true in this turbulent period of Egyptian history. The Pharaoh of Joseph's day was either pre-Hyksos or Hyksos, and therefore once the Hyksos arrived, and then when they were expelled over a hundred and fifty years later, new eras in Egypt's history began. But the point is not that. The attitude of the new king was rather an explanation of why this king acted as he did in view of the previous history that has been recounted. It assumes the existence of the narrative in Genesis 37 onwards.

'Did not know Joseph' might mean did not acknowledge his authority because of a change of dynasty, or simply that such time had passed that Joseph's influence was no longer recognised. But the words assume a knowledge of the traditions in Genesis.

The Hyksos, or 'rulers of foreign lands', were Semites who gained prominence in lower Egypt and then suddenly or gradually took over the kingship of Egypt by the use of horses and iron studded chariots, and the Asiatic bow. Their period of rule was from about 1720 BC to 1550 BC. They only ever ruled the lower part although at times possibly exacting tribute from upper Egypt. They thus ruled in Northern Egypt for over a hundred years. They established their capital at Avaris in the East Delta and assumed the full rank and style of traditional royalty, taking over the Egyptian state administration and gradually introducing people of their own appointment, including the famed chancellor Hur. But in fact Semites could rise to high office in Egypt in any number of dynasties, as archaeology clearly reveals, so that this is no pointer to when Joseph lived, especially as his position was said to be due to unusual circumstances.

Whatever the relationship of Joseph to them it will be quite apparent that once the Hyksos were expelled, all Semites, especially large groupings of them living together, would be looked on with suspicion. Having experienced Semite subjection Egyptians would be looking for any possibility of another such threat. The kings responsible for the defeat of the Hyksos were King Kamose and his successor King Ahmose I. The former defeated the Hyksos and confined them to the East Delta, the latter expelled them and their Semite and Egyptian supporters, and defeated them comprehensively in Palestine. Yet they may not be the king referred to here, for the children of Israel seemed to have remained loyal and not to have taken part in the fighting. So it may well have been a later king who enslaved them because he had particular plans in view for building projects for which he could utilise them. Building was a favourite hobby of many Pharaohs as they sought to immortalise their names, and archaeology bears witness to many of such projects. And as far as he was concerned all the people (apart from the priests) were his slaves. This was the custom in Egypt after what the great famine had brought about

(Genesis 47.19-22). When he was strong enough he could do with them what he would.

1.9-10 'And he said to his people, "See, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them lest they multiply, and it results that when there falls out any war they also join themselves to our enemies and fight against us, and get them up out of the land." '

It would seem from this that the children of Israel had kept themselves apart from the actual conquests of the Hyksos, for they remained where they were and were not engaged in fighting against the Egyptians. It would appear that they had maintained their loyalty to the state. Moreover had they wished to leave Egypt they could clearly have done so under the Hyksos. Thus while we can understand the fears that the king had it would seem that they were unjustified, and at least partially arose because he saw in them a good supply of labour for any attempted projects he may have, a supply which he wanted to find an excuse to call on and that he did not want to lose.

'More and mightier than we.' Clearly this meant in the area in which they dwelt. They had partly 'taken over' in parts of Goshen (an area whose exact boundaries we do not know, but it was quite widespread). The fear expressed is that they might join in any rebellion or invasion. But the fact that they had not previously done so in the most auspicious of circumstances rather negates the suggestion that it was a justified fear. It would, however, be sufficient to arouse the passions of many Egyptians who would have anti-Semite feelings as a result of the Hyksos activity, and who would even more importantly have an eye for the possessions of these resident aliens.

'And get them up out of the land.' This is probably the real reason behind his statement, the fear that they would leave the land. Semites were always moving in and out of the land in smaller numbers, but he looked on these as permanent residents and he did not want to lose them as a valuable source of slave labour. Once they had become too strong who would be able to prevent them leaving?

This serves to confirm that the children of Israel were well settled in Egypt and had at this time no intention of leaving. Although still aware of the covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they were neglecting the promises of that covenant, and ignoring the hints that had been given that they should eventually return to the promised land (50.24-25). It would have been so simple for them to leave under the Hyksos had they retained the vision to settle in God's promised land (Genesis 12.7 and often). But they had settled down and were even philandering with false gods. This whole situation is confirmed by Joshua 24.14 where there is reference to the 'the gods which your fathers served -- in Egypt'. Their faithfulness to Yahweh was in grave doubt.

1.11 'Therefore they set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens, and they built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.'

From a human point of view we have here the nub of the matter. A supply of building labourers was required and Pharaoh was looking around for potential slaves for use in his building projects. They would include many other than the children of Israel, but the children of Israel would form a major source of supply in that area. Thus their prospects completely changed and they became slave labourers for Pharaoh. One moment they were living their lives pleasantly as they had always lived them, watching over their herds and flocks, (even though it may have been getting more difficult), the next the soldiers of Pharaoh arrived and they found themselves enslaved and recruited into forced labour of an extreme kind. It was not unusual for kings to call on people for forced labour when the need arose (compare 1 Kings 5.13-14; 9.15, 21). It was a pressing into an unwelcome service which was common through the

ages. But it was naturally hated, and especially when it became as severe and extended as this period in Egypt, for here there was a further purpose in mind, the humiliation and crushing of a people into complete subservience.

We have here the same motif as in Genesis 3. The sinfulness and disobedience of those who were His now resulted in their being driven to hard labour. The sentence of Genesis 3 is again applied. If man disobeys God it would only be to his detriment.

'Store cities.' The purpose of these, among others, was to act as places where grain, oil, wines and so on, obtained from taxation, could be stored. They also probably stored weapons and armaments for maintaining frontier and defence forces. The cities were fairly close to the border.

'Store cities, Pithom and Raamses.' Around 1300 BC Sethos I began large building programmes in the North East Delta and had a residence there. It may be that it was he who founded the Delta capital largely built by his son Rameses II. who named it Pi-Ramesse, 'the house of Rameses'. Rameses II extended his building programmes throughout the whole of Egypt. Thus he may have been the Pharaoh in question which would date the Exodus in 13th century BC.

The sites of these cities are possibly known. However, their identification is by no means certain. Rameses has been identified with Avaris (Tanis), the previous Hyksos capital, which was destroyed and left waste after their expulsion and rebuilt by Sethos and Rameses. But this identification has been questioned. Another possibility is a site near Qantir. Rameses became Rameses II's main residence. Pithom ('dwelling of Tum') has been identified with Tel er-Retaba or Tel el-Maskhuta in the Wadi Tumilat (Tel el-Maskhuta is often identified as Succoth). Thus whether these were 'new' cities, or refurbishing of older ones, is also not certain. But if the majority view on the sites is accepted there had been no building projects there prior to these ones since the time of the Hyksos, which would leave a choice between the two periods for the 'Pharaoh who knew not Joseph'.

In Genesis 4.17 and 11.1-9 the building of cities was connected with man's rebellion against God. The same motif is found here. If His people would not listen to Him and would not seek to establish themselves as the people of God within the land promised to their forefathers, and establish His worship there, they would be compelled to build cities in a strange land. Compare how Cain departed from the land of his father to build a 'city' (possibly a gathering of dwellings, such as caves or tents) in a strange land (Genesis 4), as did the builder of cities in Genesis 10.11; 11.1-9. Israel also were now in a strange land, and had chosen to remain there. Thus they became involved in doing what was contrary to God's will for them. They began to build cities.

1.12 'But the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And they were disquieted because of the children of Israel.'

The activity did not serve to diminish the numbers of the children of Israel. Rather they seem to have continued to expand in numbers, no doubt also introducing into their numbers other Semites by marriage and assimilation, people who found comfort in joining a larger community, so that their superiority of numbers become a matter of alarm to the Egyptians. It seems clear that in all this they retained their identity as a people, and their 'tribal' organisation and worship, even if not as purely as they should have.

The result was that the Egyptians really did become alarmed. They wanted to keep this supply of slaves but they were concerned at the way their numbers were growing. Something had to be done about it.

The Children of Israel Are Put To Hard Service (1.13-14).

- a The Egyptians make the children of Israel serve with rigour (13).
- b They make their lives bitter with hard service (14a).
- b In mortar and brick and all manner of service (14b).
- a In all their service in which they make them serve with rigour (15).

Note the use of hard rigour in 'a' and its parallel, and the idea of service and its effects in 'b' and its parallel. But the fact that they 'served' (slaved) is stressed all the way through.

1.13-14 'And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour, and they made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and in brick and in all manner of service in the countryside, all their service in which they made them serve with rigour.'

Note the stress on their 'service' or slavery. The result was that their pleasant lives had been turned upside down. 'In mortar and in brick.' Contemporary Egyptian texts speak of the Egyptians employing the 'Apiru in dragging the huge stones required for the construction of temples in different parts of Egypt. These would then be set in place under the supervision of Egyptian experts. These 'Apiru probably included the children of Israel, the 'Hebrews' (1.15-16; 2.11-13), whom Egyptians would see as 'Apiru (see [Hebrews](#)). We should note that the term 'Hebrew' is only ever used of Israel when seen in terms of their being foreigners (thus Genesis 14.13; 39.14, 17).

'To serve with rigour, and they made their lives bitter with hard service.' Emphasis is laid on the hardness of their lives and the bitterness with which they looked back on better times. But their service was not limited to building, for others of them were forced to work in the countryside. This would have included the gathering of straw and stubble to make bricks and the digging of canals and irrigation channels, and the construction and use of different methods of transporting irrigation water. They had become an even more enslaved people than the Egyptians, seen as suitable for degraded work. Brickmaking by foreigners under the eye of Egyptian taskmasters is readily witnessed to in inscriptions.

Pharaoh Seeks To Destroy Israel Through Its Midwives (1.15-22).

- a The king of Egypt calls on the Hebrew midwives who are told at births to slay sons and let the daughters live (16-17).
- b The midwives fear God and do not obey him but save the male children alive (17).
- c The king of Egypt demands why they have done this (18).
- d The midwives reply that it is because of the quick births of the children (19).
- c God deals well with the midwives and the people multiply (20).
- b Because the midwives feared God He made them houses (21).
- a Pharaoh charges the Egyptians to cast all males into the Nile but to save alive the daughters (22).

Note that in 'a' the midwives are charged with the decimation of the male babies while in the parallel it is the Egyptians who are then charged with it. In 'b' the midwives fear God and behave rightly and in the parallel God rewards them for their right behaviour. In 'c' the king of Egypt demands why they have done this, and in the parallel the greater than the king shows His approval by blessing them. Central to the section are the quick births of the children which are multiplying the Israelite population.

1.15 'And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of one was Shiprah and the name of the other Puah.'

'The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives.' The king spoke, of course, through his representatives. His representatives spoke on his authority. All that happened in Egypt was described as done by the king, for his people were his slaves. The words spoken were to those midwives who had responsibility for 'the Hebrews'. The named midwives may have been the ones who had overall charge of midwifery, not the only midwives. There would also be many experienced women who were not officially midwives but who fulfilled the task when necessary. The actual names are testified to among the North-western Semites of the 2nd millennium BC, one attested in the 18th century BC, the other in the 14th and are clearly genuine.

When giving birth a woman would crouch, possibly on a pile of stones (see verse 16). Comparatively modern comparisons demonstrate how easily a slave worker could give birth behind a bush and then continue working. The midwives would first assist in the actual birth, and then by cutting the umbilical cord, washing the baby in water, and salting and wrapping it (compare Ezekiel 16.4).

Note here the silence as to the king's name, in contrast with the midwives. We may spend hours trying to work out who the king was, but we know instantly the names of the midwives, the servants of God, for their names are written before God. This emphasis on the recording of the names of His people continues on throughout Scripture. Each one who faithfully serves Him is known to Him by name.

It is all the more noteworthy here, and clearly deliberate in that apart from Moses everyone else is anonymous, even Moses' parents, although their descent is mentioned in order to demonstrate that they were suitable parents for God's chosen one. The emphasis is on the fact that God was at work and only His special instruments are named, because they were instruments of God. The remainder were simply a part of the great tapestry of His will.

1.16-19 'And he said, "When you do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the two stones, if it is a son then you shall kill him but if it is a daughter then she shall live." But the women feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but saved the men children alive. And the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing and have saved the men children alive?" And the midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women, for they are lively and are delivered before the midwife comes to them."

The order given by the authorities was clear. Male children born of Israelites must be smothered at birth. A series of 'accidents' must happen. The authorities wanted it done discreetly. Even they did not want to be involved in open genocide. This is a typical statement of bureaucrats who have not thought through the situation and cannot conceive that they will be disobeyed. Thus a supply of slaves will continue, while the prospectively dangerous ones will be got rid of by a cull. The girls could then be married to non-Israelites to produce further slaves, and the unity of the nation would cease to exist.

'On the two stones.' This may literally refer to two stones or more probably to a small pile. 'Two' can mean 'a few' (compare 1 Kings 17.12). They would sit or squat on them in such a way as to aid the birth.

'The women feared God.' The contest has already begun between the king of Egypt, acknowledged in Egypt as one of the gods of Egypt, and God. These women feared God and obeyed Him, rather than obeying Pharaoh.

'God.' We note here that in the first two chapters of Exodus there is no mention of Yahweh. In a foreign land, and voluntarily away from the covenant land the description is in terms of God

(1.20-21; 2.22-25). Note how this was also true for their adventures in Egypt in the final chapters of Genesis (40-50 with the exception of 49.18 which is probably a standard worship saying). In Egypt they no longer 'knew Yahweh'. For while they no doubt continued to worship Him as such (Moses' mother or ancestor is called Yo-chebed') it was outside the covenant situation, and they could not look for His covenant help in that land. They lost the realisation of Who and What He was. Indeed some worshipped Him alongside other gods. It is only once He begins His preparations for their return that the name Yahweh is again brought into mention (3.2, 4, 7, 15, 16), and equated with God (3.4). For He on His part *has* remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2.24) and has 'come down'. The case was different for Joseph in his captivity (Genesis 39). Then Yahweh was with him for he was there within Yahweh's purpose for His covenant people. But to a people dwelling without much thought in Egypt with no thought of returning to the covenant land, He could only be 'God'. He had not forgotten them, as what happens demonstrates, but His actions in the land of Egypt were by Him as their God and not as Yahweh, the name which links with covenant activity.

'They are lively.' Those who live as the slaves do find birth easier and quicker than those who are more pampered. There was thus some truth in this statement, and as the phenomenon could no doubt be testified to, their explanation was seemingly accepted.

1.20-21 'And God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew extensively. And it happened that, because the midwives feared God, he made them houses.'

God prospered His people because the numbers of people continued to grow and expand rapidly, and God prospered the midwives and they too were fruitful (see Psalm 128.1-3). 'He made them houses' probably means that they had many children so that their houses were established (compare 2 Samuel 7.11). This would probably be true of all the midwives not just the two mentioned. None would lose by obeying God. They prospered all round. They did what God desired, and God gave them what they desired. It is possible, however, that it means that they were provided with decent living accommodation.

The lesson for us all from this situation is that God does not necessarily step in to make life easy for His people even when He prospers them. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens for their good. Sometimes we may not understand what is happening, but if we saw things as He does we would realise what purpose He has in it.

Indeed we are challenged here about our own way of life. Is our prime purpose to serve God and do His will, or do we concentrate our efforts on 'building cities'? We must ask ourselves, which is most important to us?

1.22 'And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile and every daughter you shall save alive."

The surreptitious method having failed all pretence was laid aside. The order goes out from Pharaoh to all Egyptians that all Hebrew new born sons are to be thrown into the Nile, probably under the pretext of offering them to the gods. They were to be sacrificed to the Nile god. The daughters, however, were to be protected. They would cause no trouble and would have their uses. This served a twofold purpose. It demonstrated their loyalty to the Nile god, and it would in time limit the strength of Israel.

It is noteworthy that open murder was not the option. The killing was first to be hidden as due to childbirth and then to be seen as a religious act, as an offering to the Nile god. By this means they preserved their consciences. How easily men can make their religion a pretext for what they want to do, even when it is patently wrong. (Irreligious people find some other pretext).

The Birth And Growth of Moses As Yahweh's Future Deliverer (2.1-4.26).

This section takes us from the birth of Moses to the commencement of his return from Egypt. This again takes on a clear pattern.

- a The birth and deliverance of Moses and his establishment in Pharaoh's 'house' (2.1-10).
- b Moses has to flee from Egypt and falls among friends in Midian and makes his home with the Midianites (2.15c-22).
- c Conditions in Egypt worsen - God remembers His covenant with their fathers (2.23-25)
- d God appears to Moses in the sign of a flaming bush at the mountain of God (3.1-5).
- e Yahweh reveals Himself as Yahweh, the God of their Fathers, the 'I am', with the promise of Deliverance (3.6-15).
- e Moses is therefore to go to the Elders of Israel and promise a glorious deliverance (3.16-22).
- d God gives to a reluctant Moses a further three signs (4.1-9).
- c The response of Moses worsens and Yahweh becomes angry and offers him Aaron as 'his mouth' (4.10-17).
- b Moses leaves Midian for Egypt (4.18-20).
- a The renewal of Moses by deliverance from death and call to go to Pharaoh. Three sons are compared, Yahweh's firstborn (Israel), Pharaoh's firstborn, and Moses' Midianite son. Moses must choose whom he will serve (4.21-26).

Note again the parallels. In 'a' Moses is born, delivered and brought up in Pharaoh's household, in the parallel Moses' loyalty to Yahweh is renewed, he is delivered from death and he is to go to Pharaoh as his adversary. In 'b' Moses flees Egypt and makes his home with the Midianites, in the parallel he leaves Midian and goes to Egypt. In 'c' the situation in Egypt is worsening, but Yahweh remembers His covenant, and in the parallel Moses' relationship with Yahweh is worsening and Moses is forgetting the covenant. In 'd' God gives Moses a sign in the flaming bush and the sign of the mountain of God, and in the parallel He give Moses three signs. And in 'e' Yahweh reveals Himself as Israel's Deliverer, and in the parallel Moses is to take that deliverance to Israel.

(Note for Christians.

The New Testament takes these historical accounts and applies their principles to the modern situation. For history is seen as a continual repetition of itself. Apart from Christ the world does not change. God offered man in the Garden the possibility of living for ever under the Kingly Rule of God. But man rebelled and chose his own way (Genesis 2-3). And from then on history consisted of the few who responded to God and pleased God, and the many who lived without concern for Him.

He then called out one, Abraham, who would found his own 'kingdom of God' which would be brought into covenant with God (Genesis 12 onwards), and which would travel from place to place. But again it led to failure by man, and the kingdom eventually finished up in Egypt and became absorbed within it.

It is then offered here, in Exodus to Deuteronomy, through Moses, when the divinely perfect 'seventy' are introduced (1.5), with the final aim of establishing from their descendants God's Kingly Rule in Canaan, but from the beginning it is made clear that the people to whom He made this offer were unworthy. For having gone into Egypt which represented 'the world' they had remained there and sought to become one with them. But 'Egypt' is never a place with which men can be truly satisfied, and thus in this chapter we have seen them stirred from their lives of sin and unbelief by the sufferings that came on them, outwardly caused by their

enemies, but underneath the surface caused by God, and as the book proceeds, there will be an offering to them of coming under the Kingly Rule of God in Canaan with all that could hinder removed. But Exodus to Judges is the tale of how they will fail to seize what God has offered them, so that it will only be accepted by the few, and in the end they will go so far from God in compromise and sin that the prophets, despairing of them, predict the coming of the Kingly Rule of God in the future. But that it will come they are sure, for God has promised it. There will come an everlasting kingdom (Isaiah 9.6-7; 11; Ezekiel 37.24-28).

And the New Testament reveals a similar picture. The Jews were waiting for the coming of the Kingly Rule of God promised by the prophets, but when it came in Jesus they rejected it and only the comparatively few responded. They failed to see that the Kingly Rule of God essentially consisted in responding to and obeying the King. Thus they rejected the King sent by God. And the result was that the Kingly Rule of God was in the end offered through Jesus' Apostles to all in the world who would believe in Him and come to Him.

But did this mean that God had forsaken Israel? The answer lies in how God saw Israel. For God makes clear that the true Israel is composed of those who submit to His covenant and obey Him. In the words of Paul 'He did not cast away His people whom He foreknew' (Romans 11.2), those who were faithful to Him. And all who would come within the covenant as long as they were circumcised and became subject to His covenant requirements (12.48). As to those who did not obey His covenant they had to be cut off from it and not be seen as His people (32.33). Thus Abraham's foreign servants came within the covenant. There is no reason to doubt that the mixed multitude (12.38) came within the covenant. In the days before Christ the Jews welcomed all proselytes into the covenant theoretically at least on equal terms with natural born Jews. And thus after the resurrection of Jesus those who rejected Him were cut off from the true Israel, and the Apostles went out to form the new congregation (ekklesia) of Israel as a result of Jesus' command (Matthew 16.18). That is why when the Gentiles began to respond the question arose as to whether it was necessary for them to be circumcised in order to become members of the Israel of God. The question was, how else could they be true proselytes in accordance with 12.48? And Paul's reply was not that they were not becoming Israel. Indeed he made clear that they were (Ephesians 2.11-22). It was that they were circumcised already, in the circumcision of Christ (Colossians 2.11, 13). In Christ all had been done in order for them to become the Israel of God, God's new creation (Galatians 6.12-16), without earthly ritual. Like the offerings and sacrifices, circumcision was done away with in Christ. Thus were Christians seen as entering under the Kingly Rule of God and as the true Israel of God. For if we are Christ's then are we Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3.21).

In the New Testament this has a present and future aspect, as it also had with Jesus. In the present His Kingly Rule is enjoyed by God's true people in this world (Acts 8.12; 19.8; 20.25; 28.23, 31; Romans 14.17; 1 Corinthians 4.20; Colossians 1.13; Hebrews 1.8; 12.28;), and in the future it will be a heavenly kingdom for all who are called by God in Jesus Christ (Acts 14.22; 1 Corinthians 6.9-10; 15.24, 50; Galatians 5.21; Ephesians 5.5; 1 Thessalonians 2.12; 2 Thessalonians 1.5; 2 Timothy 4.1; James 2.5; Revelation 11.15; 12.10). Yet the distinctions are not absolute and many verses in the second category include the thought of the present inheriting of the Kingly Rule of God (the Kingdom of heaven) for all who truly believe and respond to Him.

Thus can we apply these historical lessons to our own situation. We too live at a time when the Kingly Rule of God is subject to rejection by the many. We too know that in history God's offer was made and rejected because man would not receive it on God's terms, until it was distorted beyond all recognition. And why? Because men clung to 'Egypt'. They wanted both God and Egypt and that was not possible, and so they chose 'Egypt' and tried to call it the kingdom of God. But all through history, in spite of the pretence, for the outward church was

no different from failing Israel and foolish Judaism, and it too rejected the Kingly Rule of God, replacing it with its own rule, God's work has gone on. Within the great churches that became monoliths and Egypts of their own, were always found the true believers who formed the true church, the living, invisible church, yet not really invisible, for it was visible by its life and faith expressed through the individuals who made up the whole. And in the end many broke out and formed churches of their own, only to fall into the danger of doing exactly as had been done before. Thus do all true believers constantly have to 'come forth from Egypt', whether representing a failing church or a sordid world, and turn from love of them to the service of the living God, thus revealing themselves as members of the true Israel of God. In the words of John we are called to 'love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the longings of the flesh, the longings for what is seen (of the eyes, that is, covetousness), and the arrogance and desire of position and status that bespeaks the vanity of life (the pride of life), are not of the Father but are of the world' (1 John 2.15-16). And the world consists not only of heady pleasures that destroy the soul, or the pride of self-seeking, but also of man's attempts at religion which avoid true faith in Christ and make him very satisfied with himself.

And this is not only true of the whole it is true of the part. Each individual has his own 'Egypt' from which he must be rescued, for it is the tendency of man's heart to seek the pleasures of sin (Hebrews 11.25) and the vanity of the mind (Ephesians 2.3). When they are converted many still crave for Egypt. Thus when we see Israel suffering because of its folly in clinging to Egypt we can apply it to our own tendency to do the same. And when God brings persecution and suffering on His erring people we can see in it the picture of what happens to many of us, firstly in order to release us from 'Egypt', and then in order to remove 'Egypt' from us. We should be grateful for His correction. It is because He loves us and wants our love in return (Hebrews 12.5-7).

Most of Israel would in fact never really come out of Egypt, for while their bodies moved from it their hearts would always be there. That is why they subsequently failed again and again, ever longing for Egypt. And subsequently, and ironically, Canaan the chosen land itself became an Egypt for their children, because they had failed to cleanse it of its inhabitants and its follies. It became the continual source of its temptations. It was only the few who, like the prophets, 'came out' and freed themselves, like the 'seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal' (1 Kings 19.18). And so it is for us today.

Thus as we read these records we may rightly ask, what have they to say to us. What examples can we take from them? And apply these lessons to ourselves. Something which we will seek to do at the end of each chapter. For these things were written for our learning.

Here then we learn in chapter 1 that those who are different from others because of their faith in God will always suffer persecution in one way or another, even though it be only in the home or the workplace. They may find themselves welcome in 'Egypt' for a time, but they will find that one day 'Egypt' will not like the standards that they set, the demands that they make and the way that they behave, and persecution will follow. And like the midwives they must see in it the opportunity to stand firm for God and thus enjoy His blessing. And they must rejoice in it and recognise that it is helping to free them from love of 'Egypt' which deadens the soul. For 'tribulation works patient endurance, and patient endurance results in experience, and experience produces hope, and hope does not make us ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given to us' (Romans 5.3-5). Thus through the suffering do we experience the love of God, and through it His love possesses us too.

End of note.)

The Birth of Moses (2.1-10).

It is noteworthy that out of this dreadful period God produced his man for that hour. For in the midst of the bloodbath and the despair a child was born, who would be the deliverer of his people.

- **a A man of Levi marries a daughter of Levi (1).**
- **b The woman bares a son and hides him for three months (2).**
- **c She puts him in a waterproofed basket of bulrushes and puts it in the reeds at the Nile's edge (3).**
- **d The baby's sister stands by to see what will happen to him (4).**
- **e The daughter of Pharaoh, watched over by her maids, comes to bathe in the river (5a).**
- **f She sees the basket and sends a handmaid to fetch it (5b).**
- **f She opens it and sees the child weeping (6a).**
- **e She has compassion on him and declares him to be one of the ill-fated Hebrew children, a child of the river (6b).**
- **d Moses' sister asks if she should seek a Hebrew wet nurse for him (7).**
- **c Pharaoh's daughter sends Moses' sister and she brings the child's mother, she who put the child in the basket, and Pharaoh's daughter pays her wages to wean the child (8-9).**
- **b The child grows and she adopts it as her son (10a)**
- **a He is called Moses because he was drawn out of the water (10).**

The parallels here are striking. In 'a' the child comes from the chosen tribe of Israel, and in the parallel comes forth from the river. In 'b' the woman bears her son and in the parallel the daughter of Pharaoh adopts him as her son. In 'c' the woman commits her son to God and in the parallel is called on to bring him up. In 'd' the sister waits to see what will happen and in the parallel is there to find a wet nurse for the baby. In 'e' Pharaoh's daughter comes to the river, and in the parallel she sees Yahweh's chosen one, a child of the river, and has compassion on him. The great enemy's household will protect the child of God's deliverance. In 'f' she sends for the basket and in the parallel opens it

2.1-2 'And there went a man of the house of Levi and took to wife a daughter of Levi, and the woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw him that he was a healthy child she hid him three months.'

'A man from the household of Levi.' Notice that the full blown tribal title 'Levite' is not yet in use (contrast 4.14). These titles are gradually developing. We note also that no names are given here for Moses' father and mother. This may suggest that Amram and Yochebed were in fact ancestors of Moses and not his actual father and mother (compare Exodus 6.20, which see). What is important is that Moses came from the chosen tribe (Deuteronomy 18.5).

So here from the beginning of Exodus there is an emphasis on the special obedience of the tribe of Levi. This will come out again later, both with regard to the worship of the molten calf (32.26-28), and with regard to the slaughter of the idolatrous Simeonite chief and his adulterous, idol-worshipping lover (Numbers 25.7). It was this special zeal for God that would make them suitable to be His chosen servants.

'Daughter of Levi.' Not necessarily directly so, but a woman descendant as with 'son of' (but see Numbers 26.59). The question again is whether Numbers 26.59 is to be taken literally without any generations missed out. If so Yochebed cannot be the direct mother of Moses if they were in Egypt for four hundred years. But it was quite common in genealogies to miss out names and only include important ones.

The mother hid her baby for three months to prevent any ill-wisher from throwing him into the Nile. Possibly she stayed hidden in the house and did not announce the birth, or possibly she made out to everyone that he was a girl and kept him in secrecy, although it may be that

that would be frowned on by worshippers of God (Deuteronomy 22.5). Note that Hebrew stresses that this was an act of faith (Hebrews 11.23). His parents were expecting God to do something.

'For three months.' That is, for a goodly time, until it was no longer possible.

'Was a healthy child.' The word can be translated, 'goodly', 'handsome', 'beautiful'. It is the word used in Genesis 1 of the world being 'good'. The point is rather that there was something about him that made his mother see him as good in God's eyes, as 'promising' and 'whole'.

The suggestion that 'conceived and bore a son' indicates only a firstborn, as has been suggested, cannot be maintained as is evident from Genesis 38.4.

2.3 'And when she could no longer hide him she took for him a papyrus basket and daubed it with slime and pitch, and she put the child in it and laid it in the reeds by the brink of the Nile. And his sister stood some distance away to see what would be done to him.'

Once the baby was too old to continue hiding she knew that she had to formulate another plan. She made (or had by her) a basket of papyrus ('an ark of papyrus'). It would be made of papyrus strips bound or woven together. She then made it watertight by covering it with bitumen and pitch. Such chests often served as housing for the images of gods dedicated to temples. Perhaps she hoped that some Egyptian would see it as an offering to the Nile and would be disposed to keep it, not knowing it was a Hebrew child, although if he was circumcised on the eighth day that would be a give-away (when Egyptians circumcised they did so at around thirteen).

It will be noted that by her action she was technically following the law. To an Egyptian she would be seen as offering him to the Nile god, and by that she could cover herself. But in her heart she was offering him to God. She believed that somehow Yahweh would intervene to save him. It may well be that she had in mind the 'ark' through which Noah had been delivered. Certainly the writer, in using the same word for 'ark', would have that in mind. Once again then we have a parallel with Genesis.

The circumstances fit the times. It may be that Moses' mother was influenced by stories she had heard of similar things happening to others. That of Sargon of Agade is often quoted. In the case of Sargon, his own mother exposed him to drowning by putting him in a basket-shaped boat and setting him afloat, because he was an illegitimate child. But the record about Sargon is Babylonian, and the motive is different and even the term for the ark is different - Sargon's was a basket-shaped boat, kuppū, which was intended to go to sea, and to float away. Here it was no boat, and the desperate plan was not to set him afloat on the Nile to drift away so that she would be rid of him, but with the express purpose of saving her baby's life. There is no hint of Babylonian influence in the story here. It is purely Egyptian.

'In the reeds.' Probably actually in the water among the reeds, as she had waterproofed it. It may well have been a recognised place for ritual ablutions among wealthy and distinguished Egyptians, and she may even have known that Pharaoh's daughter went there to worship regularly.

'His sister stood some distance away'. The mother was committing her child into God's hands but her faith in God is demonstrated by the fact that she wanted if possible to know what happened to him, and so the daughter of the house kept watch in order to see what might happen. She had not just deserted her baby in despair.

2.5 'And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked

along by the river side, and she saw the basket among the reeds and sent her handmaid to fetch it.'

And so it happened that one of Pharaoh's daughters came down to bathe in the Nile. This may well have been for the purposes of a ritual act as the Nile was worshipped in the form of the god Ha'pi, the spirit of the Nile flood. It would be a private place and her maids would patrol the banks to keep prying eyes away while she bathed. It was the princess herself who spotted the basket, for she was the one who entered the water among the reeds in order to bathe herself in the Nile, and she sent her personal servant to obtain it for her. It is probable that she thought it would contain an image of the gods and wondered why it was there.

'The daughter of Pharaoh.' This may not mean simply any daughter of the Pharaoh, but be a literal reproduction of the Egyptian Saat Nesu, "daughter of the king", being the official title of a princess of royal blood, just as Sa Nesu, "son of the king", was the official title of royal princes.

But Pharaoh had many daughters, born to both royal wives and concubines, living in harems throughout Egypt which would be regular hives of activity. An inscription on the temple at Abydos in Egypt gives the names of fifty nine daughters of Rameses II. Their children would be educated by 'the overseer of the harem' (the 'teacher of the children of the king'), and later be given a tutor who would be a high official at court or a military official close to the king.]

Note the contrast in the analysis. On the one hand is Pharaoh's daughter, descended from the great Pharaoh himself, the self-avowed enemy of the people of God, on the other is the baby, one of His people, chosen by God and under His protection. And He constrains Pharaoh's daughter to care for the babe.

2.6 'And she opened it and saw the child, and behold, the baby cried. And she had compassion on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children." '

When she opened it to her surprise she saw a baby. And just then the baby woke and cried. This moved her heart and she clearly determined that she would keep it. Her quick mind immediately recognised that it was a Habiru child (see [Hebrews.](#) That is how she would think of it) and she knew what their fate was to be. But she felt sorry for it and was ready to show it mercy. So she determined to adopt it as her own. Perhaps she herself had proved infertile. It may indeed have been that it was about that that she had prayed as she bathed. And she no doubt felt that she was above the wrath of Pharaoh, and anyway, she knew that she could depict it as a gift from the god Ha'pi. And it may well be that that was how she saw it.

2.7 'Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women that she may nurse the child for you?" '

We are not told the detail of the princess's decision, except by implication, nor of what was said, but the quick-witted sister of Moses recognised the position, and managing to approach her, offered to find a nursemaid for her among the Habiru. A nursemaid would be needed who could breast-feed the child, for neither the princess or her maids were in that position, nor would they want the task of nursing the child and dealing with his ablutions, and that was what would be required of a nurse. What was needed was a woman who still had milk in her breasts. In those days women who had such milk available because their own child had died, often hired themselves out for the purpose of suckling a child.

2.8-9 'And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." And the woman took the child and nursed it.'

Moses' mother was brought and was passed as suitable. Then she was sent away to look after the child, but hardly back to her home. Rather it would probably be to some sumptuous nursery with everything needed on hand. There she would have responsibility for the child and would be paid for her service. The princess would no doubt look in whenever she felt like it to find out 'her child' was progressing.

2.10 'And the child grew and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said "Because I drew him out of the water."

When the child had been weaned at about three or four years old his mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter who then officially adopted him.

'He became her son.' It would appear that this is the time at which she named him. It is probable that his mother has already been calling him 'Moses' (mosheh - 'one who draws forth') as the one who had been 'drawn out' (mashah) of the water and had 'drawn out' compassion from the princess, and that she had explained this to the princess. (Moses' mother would certainly speak some Egyptian). This would explain the princess's amused comment and how she introduced a Hebrew verb (mashah) into her Egyptian speech. She may have Egyptianised the name to 'ms' ('child' or 'one born') or even mu-sheh ('child of the lake' signifying the Nile), or initially she may have attached the name of a god to ms ('child of --'). But we must be careful here. The 's' in ms is different from the 'sh' in Moses and is not the usual transposition (which counts against the princess originally choosing the name ms for then it would be transposed correctly and not as Mosheh. The Egyptian for Ra'amses, for example, does not take on 'sh' in Hebrew. But if the name was already settled on the basis of the Hebrew a transposition to the Egyptian language need not have been quite so particular). But her naming of the child is mentioned because it was very important in political terms. It marked him as being of the royal house, and as being a gift from the Nile god.

The name is in deliberate contrast to the fate of other Hebrew males. They were thrown into the water, but Moses was drawn out of the water. We can compare here 2 Samuel 22.17; Psalm 18.16 which may well have had this incident in mind, and certainly illustrate it, 'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me from many waters, He delivered me from my powerful enemy and from those who hated me for they were too strong for me'. God turned the tables on Pharaoh, and Moses was constantly there as a witness to the fact.

It is probable that Pharaoh's vindictive command did not last for too long a period. Perhaps he found that his own people were unwilling to carry out their invidious task enthusiastically, especially after the first waves of deaths. It was hardly a policy that most people would put much effort into on a continual basis once their blood lust and anger had been assuaged. Perhaps the Egyptians began to recognise that they would lose a good source of slave labour. And perhaps he was made to recognise that it was after all only a long term solution. It would be twenty or more years before it even began to work effectively. And the animosity which would arise among the large numbers of 'Hebrews' would meanwhile be difficult to contain. The fact is that it was not a workable long term policy even for a tyrant.

Moses Has To Flee From Egypt (2.11-15b).

Moses would have been educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, being groomed for high office. Loyal relatives who had no pretensions to a claim to the throne were always a bonus to ancient kings. But the writer is not interested in that. What mattered was that Moses aligned himself with the people of God.

- a When grown up Moses goes among his Hebrew brothers and sees an Egyptian taskmaster beating one of them severely (11).

- **b** Seeing no one around he kills the Egyptian and hides his body in the sand (12).
- **c** Next day he sees two Hebrews fighting fiercely and challenges the aggressor as to why he is doing it (13).
- **c** The aggressor lets him know that he knows about the murder and Moses is afraid because the thing was known (14).
- **b** When Pharaoh hears of the thing he seeks to have Moses executed (15a).
- **a** Moses flees from the face of Pharaoh and dwells in the land of Midian (15b).

We note that in 'a' Moses chooses to be with his Hebrew brothers and in the parallel has therefore to flee from Pharaoh's face for foreign parts (compare Hebrews 11.24). He had had to choose whose side he was on. In 'b' he kills the Egyptian and in the parallel punishment is demanded for the killing. In 'c' he challenges the aggressor and in the parallel the aggressor replies.

2.11-12 'And it happened in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brothers and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brothers, and he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man there, he smote the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.'

'When Moses was grown up.' What a large compass is contained in this verse. Moses' education from 'the teacher of the children of the king', his tuition under some important court official (with the help of the priestly caste) which would probably include reading and writing, transcription of classical texts and civil and military administration, his experience of courtly affairs, his grounding in the faith of his fathers by his mother, until at last he was 'grown up' and had reached manhood. But that he knew his background comes out in the incident here (his natural mother had probably made sure of that). And he goes out to visit his relatives. He saw them as his 'brothers'. He deliberately aligned himself with the people of God.

And when he saw the burdens they had to bear, and especially some particularly vicious treatment from an Egyptian overseer, he could stand it no longer and, after making sure that there was no one about, slew the overseer. Then he disposed of the body in a sandy grave. The arrogance of his upbringing comes out here. He was not afraid to act (compare also 2.17-19), and he did not feel bound by the law. The beating must have been particularly severe for Moses to act as he did for he must have seen beatings often before. But it does bring out the oneness that he felt with his fellow-Hebrews. Son of Pharaoh he may be, but he loved his kinsfolk, and he loved the God of the Hebrews.

Was Moses wrong in what he did? If the beating might have led to the death of the Hebrew he was surely in the right. And we can well argue that it led to a necessary training in wilderness conditions which would stand him in good stead in the Exodus. On the other hand it might be seen as precipitating God's plans and, as a result, causing a long delay. It is again illustrative of God's sovereignty. Whether it was His 'ideal purpose' for Moses at that time is another question. But that did not matter. God simply incorporated it in His sovereign plan.

2.13-14 'And he went out the second day and behold, two men of the Hebrews were fighting together, and he said to him who did the wrong, "Why do you smite your fellow?" And he said, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you think to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" And Moses was afraid and said, "Surely the thing is known."'

The following day he again went out among his fellow-kinsmen and he saw two Hebrews fighting together, a situation clearly caused by the particular viciousness of one of them. This concerned him for he felt that they should all work together in harmony, and he felt very much one of them. He thought that they should be looking out for each other. But he was learning the

lesson that was to come home to him even more sharply later, that men are self-willed and selfish, and are generally out for what they can get. They did not want his interference.

When he tried to intervene he discovered that the most belligerent one was not grateful to him for the help he had given one of their fellows. Rather the culprit, who two days previously would probably have responded with submission to such an important man, had lost all fear of Moses because he felt that he now had a hold over him. He knew what Moses had done.

‘Who made you a prince and a judge over us?’ The answer, as the writer knew, and wants us to recognise, was ‘God’, and a prince and judge over them Moses would later be, but he had much to go through before then. Meanwhile the questioner was rather being derisive. Another answer could have been, ‘Pharaoh’. But not when he had disobeyed Pharaoh and betrayed his trust. Once the truth was known he would no longer have the support and authority of Pharaoh. Let him recognise that he who had given him his authority also had authority over him and would call him to account. Or the man may simply have been saying, “Get lost. Who do you think you are? You have no authority over us. We are not your responsibility. And I have enough on you to get you into very serious trouble.”

‘Surely the thing is known.’ He realised that the man he had saved had probably told someone, and that others also may have seen what had happened. And he feared that the news would spread like wildfire. Many would be jealous of Moses and would not think well towards him, and they would be quite likely to tell others in authority who hated him. Thus he recognised that the news would pass from man to man until it reached the ears of Pharaoh.

2.15a ‘Now when Pharaoh heard this thing he sought to slay Moses.’

As he might have expected the news inevitably filtered through to the Egyptians and then to Pharaoh himself. We can imagine what Pharaoh thought when he found that one of his princes had taken sides with the Hebrews against an Egyptian taskmaster. This was flagrant opposition to Pharaoh and could not be left unpunished, for if it was the Hebrews might be encouraged and rebellion might ensue. He might indeed have seen it as the first beginnings of a rebellion. Thus his only option was a quick and sharp response. The order went out for the arrest of Moses, with a view to his execution.

‘He sought to slay Moses.’ Compare 4.24 where Yahweh will outwardly seek the death of Moses, although the verb for killing is different. Pharaoh’s was to be a legal execution for disloyalty and treason, Yahweh’s an action because of a covenant breach. But both had in mind that Moses had ‘betrayed his trust’.

2.15b ‘But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian.’

Moses knew what was in store for him and that his only hope lay in escape. But he little realised that he was treading a path then that he would again tread many years later with responsibility for a large number of people. It was preparing him for what was to come. So he fled the country, taking a similar route to that which he would take later with the Israelites, and that taken by a man called Sinuhe whose life story we discover in Egyptian records. Indeed it was a route by which many were known to attempt their escape.

‘Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian.’ is there here a reflection of Genesis 4.16? ‘And Cain went out from before the face of Yahweh and dwelt in the land of Nod’. Both had committed murder, but has the writer in mind that while in the case of Cain he had become estranged from Yahweh, Moses had only become estranged from Pharaoh? Yet both would be a long time in the wilderness (Nod was the land of ‘wandering’), and both would find mercy of a kind. On the other hand Cain turned to city-building, while

Moses found his way to the mountain of God. Therein lies the difference.

'Dwelt in the land of Midian.' The important thing was to go where he could not be found. Canaan was under Egyptian jurisdiction. But the Midianites, connected with Abraham through Keturah's son Midian, whose name they had taken, were a roving people and the wilderness was their home. Nor did they owe allegiance to Egypt. They lived to the south and east of Canaan in the semi-desert. They were not a people who prove helpful to Pharaoh in his search, or among whom he could pursue enquiries with any hope of finding something out. The tribespeople would be inaccessible and uncommunicative, and besides, once he had disappeared Moses was probably not considered to be important enough to make too great a fuss over. No one would know where he had gone. Pharaoh could afford to wait until he surfaced.

The Midianites already used camels (Genesis 37.25) which they would later use extensively (Judges 6.5). They were split into a number of groups but could come together when the need arose or when it was of some benefit to them.

Moses Falls Among Friends in Midian (2.15c-20).

Moses' position was precarious. But God had not forsaken him. And he would soon raise him to a position where he could prepare for his (as yet unknown to Moses) future.

- **a Moses sits down by a well (15c).**
- **b The seven daughters of the priest of Midian come and draw water at the well, drawing water and filling the troughs to water their father's flock (1a).**
- **c Shepherds come and drive them away (17a).**
- **c Moses stands up and helps them against the shepherds and waters their flock (17b).**
- **b The daughters return home and when questioned explain about the Egyptian who helped them against the shepherds and drew water and watered the flock (18-19).**
- **a Their father tells them to call Moses that he might receive hospitality (20).**

We note in the parallels how in 'a' Moses comes to the well for refreshment and in the parallel receives abundant hospitality. In 'b' the daughters come to water their flock and in the parallel explain how their flock was watered. In 'c' shepherds came to drive them away and in the parallel Moses drives the shepherds away.

2.15c 'And he sat down by a well.'

For a while Moses made his home there in the Sinai peninsula as a solitary, living as he could, although we do not know whether it was for but a few days, or whether it was for longer. But then something happened which was to change his fortunes yet again. He sat down by a spring, no doubt because he was thirsty, and possibly because he hoped to meet people who might be willing to help him and provide him with work and food. The needs of the desert produce their own friendships, and a well was the place to meet people (compare John 4).

2.16 'And the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. And the shepherds came and drove them away. But Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.'

When the seven daughters of the priest of Midian arrived at the well they went through the same routine as they did every day. They tried to water their sheep before others arrived. But once they had filled the stone troughs male shepherds arrived and forced them to give way. And the young women had to stand by. They could do nothing about it. They had to watch in frustration while the water they had drawn was being utilised by others. It was not the first

time. They thought that it was to be just another day of submissive waiting. But then to their surprise the young Egyptian who was standing by, well armed and clearly capable of looking after himself, stood up and defended them and enabled them to water their flocks straightaway, assisting them in their task.

Moses was a young man at the height of his manhood, and would feel no fear in dealing with bullies, any more than he had when dealing with the taskmaster. He had not yet learned what it was to be afraid of men. And the shepherds would see by his clothes that he was an influential Egyptian, possibly even a prince. They would recognise that to offend him might bring the wrath of Egypt on their heads. And besides he might have soldiers nearby. They would be very hesitant in their dealings with him.

'The priest of Midian.' We do not know what this entailed. As priest he may have been like Samuel, the priest of a central sanctuary, or he may just have been priest of his own family group or clan. In view of the mention of the title the former is more probable. The aim is to show that they were related to an important man.

'Seven daughters.' In the fact that there were seven the writer no doubt had in mind God's perfect provision for Moses through their good offices, and that they provided a suitable God-given source for a future wife of Moses.

2.18-20 'And when they came to Reuel their father, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" And they said, "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hands of the shepherds, and moreover he actually drew water for us and watered the flock." And he said to his daughters, "And where is he? Why is it that you left the man? Call him so that he may eat food with us."

The daughters returned to their camp where their 'father' Reuel (also named Jethro - 3.1; 4.18) was waiting, and they were so early that it caused their father to comment. But when he heard the reason for their early return he was concerned that they had not extended to the Egyptian the courtesy that was due to him. So he told them to fetch Moses so that they could extend hospitality to him in recognition of his help and friendship.

Again we find a man with a dual name. This appears to have been fairly commonplace at the time, occurring when men had had a special experience of God or had been given leadership. 'Reuel' means 'a friend of God.' And that was what he proved to be that day. This may have been the name given to him when he became 'the priest of Midian', used here rather than his personal name Jethro because Moses was being officially welcomed. (But some see the name Jethro as meaning 'pre-eminence'. Thus the converse may apply) He had a son called Hobab (Numbers 10.29) who is elsewhere called an 'in-law' of Moses and a Kenite (Judges 4.11 see also Judges 1.16). Reuel and Jethro are significantly never specifically called Kenites, so Hobab's connection with the Kenites may have been through marriage or assimilation.

(On the other hand it may be that Reuel was only their 'father' in the sense that he was the head of the family tribe (compare Genesis 29.5 where Nahor is head of the family tribe, not Laban's father), with Jethro his son, 'the priest of Midian', as their actual father, who was later renamed Hobab, possibly when he finally joined up with the children of Israel (Numbers 10.29-32). If so this would help to explain why Reuel's name is not given in verse 16).

Moses Makes His Home With The Midianites (2.21-22).

The situation suited both parties. The tribe acquired a valuable man of ability and courage. Moses found a home.

- a Moses is content to dwell with the man (21a).
- b Reuel gives him his daughter to wife (21b).
- b His wife bears a son who is called Gershom (22a).
- a This is because he is dwelling as a resident alien in a foreign land (22b).

Note how in 'a' Moses takes up residence in Midian and in the parallel has named his son accordingly. In 'b' he marries Reuel's daughter and in the parallel the daughter bears him a son.

2.20-21 'And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter, and she bore a son and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a strange land."

Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Reuel was probably the leader of a family tribe. But in the area in which they were they may not only have been involved in keeping sheep and tilling the ground, but also in mining copper (the Kenites - 'smiths' - were Midianites and Hobab was later seen as connected with the Kenites), in trading, and sometimes in robbing caravans in alliance with other Midianites. Moses joined the group under the protection of the chief. As a man well able to look after himself and knowledgeable about administrative and military affairs, both of which he would have learned in Egypt, he would be welcome. There he married the chief's daughter and had a son.

But the fact that no men had been available to accompany the seven daughters with their sheep may serve to demonstrate that the group was not very large, although probably part of a larger loose confederacy. For although well born daughters did look after sheep in those days, these were having particular frustrations. However it may be that the group's main activity was trading (compare the Midianites who bought Joseph) or raiding so that the men of the group were not seen as available for the task of looking after the sheep which could thus easily be left to the womenfolk, and their frustrations were probably dismissed as long as no harm came to the sheep. Jethro certainly later demonstrated some knowledge of controlling tribal affairs (chapter 18) and he was also 'the priest of Midian'. It suggests that he was used to overseeing a tribe, although how far that reached we cannot know.

'He gave Moses Zipporah his daughter.' Zipporah means 'Little Bird', and we can significantly compare Judges 6-8 where the Midianite chiefs were 'Raven' and 'Wolf'. This is evidence of historicity. Moses was now well established as the chief's son. In this marriage both parties gave recognition of each other's social status.

'Called his name Gershom.' 'Ger' means a foreigner, a sojourner, a stranger. Moses construes the name here as meaning 'a stranger there', the regular play on words common with both tribal and Egyptian names. Moses' comment suggests how hardly he understandably felt his exile. For a time he longed to be back in Egypt.

Conditions In Egypt - The Covenant Remembered (2.23-25)

But meanwhile in Egypt time passed, and the death of a new king probably raised hopes of more leniency. However, it was seemingly not to be, and the heaviness of their bondage weighed them down.

- a In the course of those days the king of Egypt died (23a).
- b The children of Israel sighed in their bondage and cried to God (23b).
- c Their cry came up to God by reason of their bondage (23c)
- c God heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (24).

- **b** As a result of their cry God saw the children of Israel (25a).
- **a** God 'took knowledge' (of the situation) (25b).

Note in the parallels that in 'a' the king of Egypt dies, a major event in the world of that day, in the parallel Yahweh takes knowledge of the situation in order to act. In 'b' the children of Israel are in bondage and cry to God, and in the parallel God 'sees' the children of Israel. In 'c' their cry comes up to God because of the situation, and in the parallel God hears their cry and remembers His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

2.23 'And it happened in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God by reason of the bondage.'

The king who had enslaved the children of Israel died. The death of a king was often a time of hope to those who suffered under the king, but it appears in this case that his death was simply a reminder to them of their continuing bondage. They found that their bondage did not cease. It possibly even became worse. Their sufferings continued under the new Pharaoh and their cry, re-aroused by their disappointment in the non-improvement of their lot, went up to God. However it is probable that the slaughter of their sons was no longer being carried out. That probably only occurred over a short intensive period, although it may have been renewed now and again.

'In the course of those many days.' The suffering and bondage went on for a long time, in all over a hundred years. The reference is general to bring out the length of the suffering. But there may be a specific reference to the time since Moses left Egypt. It would certainly seem a long time to the sufferers. All the time that Moses was in Midian (probably seen as 'forty years', the second period of Moses' long life - compare 7.7) the suffering went on.

2.24-25 'And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob, and God saw the children of Israel, and God took knowledge (of them or of their situation).'

God was not oblivious to their situation, but things had to fall into place and lessons had to be learned. God is never in a hurry. He just ensures that His purposes go forward smoothly. Yet He had not forgotten His promises to the fathers of these people. And now He positively chose to 'remember'. Note the fourfold repetition of 'God'. There is an emphasis on Who it was Who specifically called them to mind. In other words it was 'God Himself', the only God, Who began the process which would bring about their deliverance, a process which, unknown to them, was taking place in far off Midian. As a result He will soon reappear under His old covenant name of Yahweh, for to Moses there was only one God. Then they will know that the day of deliverance is at hand.

'The children of Israel.' This phrase must here be given its full force. It was their connection with the one to whom the covenant was confirmed, Israel/Jacob himself, that resulted in God's activity on their behalf. Yahweh was carrying forward His plan first formulated with Abraham.

'Took knowledge ('of them' or 'of their situation').' The verb to 'know' means more than mental cognisance, it includes personal response (compare Genesis 18.19; Amos 3.2). Yahweh would again approach to act on behalf of His people, either because of His care for them or because of His involvement in the situation. It will be noted that in the Hebrew the verb has no object, so either suggested inference is possible. He became aware of the whole situation, and the conditions under which His people were living.

(Note for Christians.

From this chapter we learn that the sufferings of His people are never unknown to God. And they can thus be sure that when such sufferings come, somehow or another, though they have to wait long, God will provide for them a way of escape, whether in this world or the next. For we do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen (2 Corinthians 4.18), just as Moses did here (Hebrews 11.26). For God watches over His own, and when things seem at their worst, that is often when God begins to plan His best.

A further lesson we learn from Moses is that when we genuinely seek to follow His will He will act on our behalf, even despite our folly. Moses committed murder, but God used his folly in order to prepare him for the task that lay ahead, and gave him a new family, wife and children into the bargain.

And just as Moses, though under threat of death, was raised a deliverer, so our Lord Jesus Christ came to deliver us through a threat of death that became a reality. As Moses gave God's Law to the people so did Jesus Christ bring us God's Law, taking of the Law of Moses and building on it. And while Moses risked his life for his people, our Lord Jesus Christ gave His life for us, and then in order to accomplish our deliverance rose again that we might live through Him. Thus we look to a greater than Moses.

End of note).

The Call of Moses (3.1-4.17).

What has gone before was preparatory to what follows. It is now that the main story of the book begins, which will take us from God's call to Moses, to the establishment of the covenant at Sinai and the erecting of God's earthly Dwellingplace, over a period of about two years.

But note the care that has been taken over the training of this man we see before us. He does not know it but he has been fully prepared by God. In Egypt he has been trained in statecraft and law, he has been involved with those who ran a great and powerful nation, and has no doubt had his share in the running of it. He has learned the discipline of power. But what is equally important in Midian he has been trained in desert lore. He now knew where water was to be found in the desert, he knew the secrets of the wilderness of Sinai, he knew the ways that led through that mountainous wilderness and which ways could take a multitude of people and which could not, and apart from his brother-in-law Hobab who was clearly famous for his desertcraft, whom he was able to call on for help (Numbers 10.29, Hobab would have done it for no one else), none was better aware of how to survive in that sometimes dreadful place. No one had been better trained and equipped to be a trek leader than he.

God Appears To Moses In A Flaming Bush (3.1-5).

- **a Moses is feeding the flock and comes to the mountain of God (1).**
- **b The Angel of Yahweh appears to him in a flaming fire in the midst of a bush (2a).**
- **c Moses sees the bush burning and that it is not being consumed (2b).**
- **c Moses says that he will turn aside and see why this wonder of a burning bush not being consumed (3).**
- **b Yahweh sees that he has turned aside and calls to him from the midst of the bush (4)**
- **a He is not to approach but to take off his shoes because he is on holy ground (5).**

Note the parallels. In 'a' Moses comes to the holy 'mountain of God', in the parallel he is not to approach but take off his shoes because he is on holy ground. In 'b' the Angel of Yahweh appears in flaming fire in a bush, in the parallel Yahweh speaks to Moses from the bush. In 'c'

Moses sees that the bush is not consumed, in the parallel he turns aside to see why the bush is not consumed.

3.1 'Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the back of the wilderness and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb.'

Moses was now well settled into the family tribe of Reuel and here is seen fulfilling responsibilities for the flocks. There may well have been others with him keeping the flock, possibly even some of the daughters. We have to recognise that we can only speculate as to the make up of the group to which he belonged for we are told nothing. No mention is made of what had happened to the seven daughters, or why Moses should be the shepherd here rather than be involved in other activities of the group. It may be that he was filling in between these other activities, and was accompanied by some of the daughters.

'Led the flock to the back of the wilderness.' He seems to have wandered some distance from the normal pasturage, possibly because of shortage of good pasture. This need to travel some distance may explain why he had been put in charge of them at this time. He had to drive the sheep from the Midianite encampment as far as Horeb, so that after first passing through a wilderness he reached the pasture land there. In this, the most elevated ground of the peninsula, fertile valleys could be found in which fruit-trees grew, and water abounded even in the bad times. It is still the resort of the Bedouin when the lower areas dry up. And he had been involved in this and similar wilderness activity for forty years.

'To the mountain of God.' This is probably the writer's description in the light of what he knew was to come, both in this chapter and later. In the analysis above the parallel is that it is holy ground. It may suggest that it was already looked on as a sacred mountain, but this is not evidenced elsewhere. That God would choose it for a revelation of Himself is sufficient to justify the description. The mountain of God was Mount Sinai (Exodus 24.13) which is in the wilderness of Sinai.

'To Horeb.' It may be that Horeb was the area around the mount but including the mount, for 'Sinai' is always qualified by either 'the wilderness of' or 'Mount' to distinguish the two (except for Exodus 16.1 where it is used loosely, and in poetry in Deuteronomy 33.2; Judges 5.5; Psalm 68.8, 17), whereas Horeb was usually geographically referred to as a place. There is only once a mention of 'Mount Horeb', and that may even be a different local peak (Exodus 33.6 but see also 1 Kings 19.8, although the latter may arise from the same problem as we have, interpretation). This suggests that Mount Sinai and Horeb, while closely identified, are not to be seen as synonymous expressions, with Horeb having a wider meaning and including the plain beneath the Mount. Indeed the area of Horeb clearly stretched even further afield (Exodus 17.6). There may also be some truth in the idea that Sinai was the Canaanite name for the mountain and Horeb the Midianite name, but that would not fully account for the differing usage. But it may be that the Canaanites tended to think only of the particular impressive mountain while the Midianites thought in terms of the whole place where they wandered.

3.2 'And the angel of Yahweh appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the middle of a bush, and he looked, and behold the bush burned with fire and the bush was not consumed.'

God appears as 'the angel of Yahweh'. This is another connection of the book with Genesis. It parallels the use of the term in Genesis 16.7-13; 22.11-18; Numbers 22.22-35 compare Genesis 21.17). Ishmael would go on from such an appearance to found a nation. In the Pentateuch the phrase always refers to God directly as openly revealing Himself at a time of crisis in covenant matters. So now in this time of crisis Yahweh is revealing Himself in a direct way to Moses. He too is going forward to found a nation. This mention of the Angel of Yahweh stresses the direct relationship of His action with the covenant, and relates back to 2.24. The Angel of Yahweh

was the manifestation of the God of the covenant of their fathers.

Here we have the first use of Yahweh in Exodus. This is because as their covenant God He is now stepping into their situation to act in accordance with His covenant.

'Appeared in a flame of fire.' Many attempts have been made to explain this naturally. Bushes do sometimes burst into flame in hot countries, and Moses may well at first have thought that that was what was happening here. But the point that is made, and presumably impressed Moses, was that it went on burning without consuming the bush and did not die out. It was not the natural phenomenon that he was used to. The undying flame was a fit picture of the 'I am What I am', the ever existing and present One, by which Yahweh revealed Himself and His nature..

God appearing in fire is common in both Old and New Testaments (see Genesis 15.17; Exodus 13.21; 19.16, 18; 20.18; 24.17; 40.38; Deuteronomy 4.11; Ezekiel 1.27; 8.2; Acts 2.3; 1 Timothy 6.16; Revelation 21.23; 22.5). To the ancients such a manifestation was a combination of the inexplicable and beneficial, dangerous and yet vital. It had no form and yet could be seen even in the darkness. It benefited man and yet could consume him. It was glorious and awe-inspiring and then in a moment it could be gone. In manifestation it brought home something of the significance of the divine.

'Out of the middle of a bush.' It may well have been God's intention that Moses was to see in the sparse desert bush a picture of afflicted Israel. The idea would then be that God was among His people in an undying flame, just as the lampstand in the Tabernacle would later represent the same. It may be of some significance in regard to this that the lampstand later represented a tree, with the burning flames at the tips. By then the thorn bush had potentially become a fruit tree (25.31-40).

3.3 'And Moses said, "I will turn aside now and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."

Moses had seen many bushes burn briefly but not one that went on and on burning incessantly. So he decided that he must take a closer look. The words may simply have been passing through his thoughts, or they may have been spoken to those who were with him. But either way he somehow knew that he must approach the bush alone.

3.4 'And when Yahweh saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moses, Moses." And he said, "I'm here." And he said, "Do not draw near here. Take your sandals off from your feet for the place on which you stand is sanctified ground.'

Note that it was 'Yahweh' Who saw that he turned aside to see, but 'God' Who called to him from the bush. It was important to link this visit of the Angel of Yahweh (verse 2) with the God Who was so concerned about Israel. This use of 'God' very much emphasises His oneness. The introduction of the name Yahweh signalled the commencement of new covenant activity. We can compare how in Genesis, when Ishmael was to be restored to the covenant community it was 'the Angel of Yahweh' Who met him (Genesis 16), but when he was leaving the covenant community for ever he was helped by 'the Angel of God' (Genesis 21.17). This is a reversal of that situation. Now it was Moses, who had been so long away from the covenant community and covenant matters, and had lived among strangers under the hand of 'God', who was being reintroduced into the covenant community. Thus the reintroduction of the name of 'Yahweh' Who was thus making His name known once again.

God called Moses twice by name. Thus did Moses know that this was personal, something for him and for him alone. Compare Genesis 22.11; 1 Samuel 3.10. The repetition of the name

always stresses urgency.

It is difficult for us to appreciate the trauma of this moment. Moses had often wandered in the wilderness. He had possibly often approached this mountain. He had fairly regularly seen bushes burning spontaneously, although never one that continued to do so like this without apparently being affected by it. But a voice was something different, especially a voice that revealed its divine source in what it commanded. We can only imagine the stunned shock. The incredulity. The fear. Moses was but a man like we are, although later he would become more familiar with the voice (compare Numbers 7.89).

'Do not draw near.' God was there, and it would have been dangerous to come too close, for God was revealed as a consuming fire.

'Take off your sandals.' Compare Joshua 5.15; 2 Samuel 15.30. Later the priests performed their duties barefoot (note that there is no mention of shoes or sandals in Leviticus 8 and the toe at least is accessible (verse 23)). Indeed in many religions men took off their shoes when entering the Sanctuary. The point was that the dirt on men's sandals must not defile the place where God is. It is a symbol of the otherness of God. The washing with water at the laver would have a similar purpose. It did not 'cleans' ('shall not be clean' is a constant refrain after washing with water) but prepared the way for cleansing by removing earthiness as man approached God in solitariness.

'Sanctified ground.' That is, ground that was set apart at that time as uniquely untouchable and holy except by God's grace, because God was there. His presence made all He came in contact with holy and exclusive (compare Exodus 19.12-13). No man could be allowed to approach such things lightly.

In his youth he had possibly known what it was to come into the presence of Pharaoh, the necessary preparation, the washing, the grooming, and then the solemn approach into the inner throne room. That preparation had been awesome. But he recognised that this was something even more traumatic. For this was unearthly, terrifying, in a way that Pharaoh had never been. Here was an unearthly presence. And he would divest himself of his sandals, and sink to his knees and wonder what was to happen to him.

He Reveals Himself as Yahweh, the God of their Fathers With the Promise of Deliverance (3.6-15).

- a Yahweh declares that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (6a).
- b Moses hides his face because he is afraid to look on God (6b).
- c Yahweh declares that He has seen the deep affliction of His people and because of it has come down to deliver them (7).
- d He will bring them into a good land, a land flowing with milk and honey (8).
- e He has heard their cry and has seen the oppression and will send Moses to Pharaoh to deliver them (9-10).
- e Moses defers and rejects the idea that he is capable of being a deliverer (11).
- d God says that He will be with him and gives as a token of his sure success that he will worship God on this mountain (12).
- c Moses explains that the people will want to know the nature of the God Who has made these promises (13).
- b Yahweh replies that His name reveals that He is the One Who acts (14).
- a Yahweh declares that it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Who is sending him to them (15).

The parallels here are striking. In 'a' and in the parallel God is declared to be the God of

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, In 'b' Moses hides his face because of his fear of God and in the parallel God reveals the amazing wonder of Who He really is. In 'c' He declares Himself the Deliverer and in the parallel Moses explains that they will want to know His credentials. In 'd' He declares that He will bring them into a good land (elsewhere His mountain - 15.17) and in the parallel the sign is that they will serve Him on His mountain here. In 'e' He appoints Moses as the deliverer and in the parallel Moses professes his inability and unworthiness.

3.6 'Moreover he said, "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 on God.'

Up to this point Moses was very uncertain as to who it was who was speaking to him from the bush. But the voice now revealed Himself as the God of his fathers ('father' is a compound singular). And Moses hid his face in awe and fear. The sense of terror increased. He dared not look at God face to face for he knew that no man could see this God and live (33.20 compare 1 Kings 19.13; Isaiah 6.2). Special men may have partial experiences of God in His hiddenness (Genesis 32.30; Exodus 33.22-23; Deuteronomy 5.24; Judges 6.22) but not in His revealed glory. And he was afraid.

Moses was clearly expected to know about the patriarchs and their special covenant relationship with God. His mother would have educated him in the history of his people, and especially in their sacred stories. Once he considered it this would explain to him Who this God was and why He was about to act. But at this point he was simply stunned.

3.7-9 'And Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good land and a large land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. And now, behold, the cry of the children of Israel has reached me. Moreover I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them."'

He learned that 'Yahweh' their God had taken knowledge of His people (2.25). He 'knows' their sorrow, that is He has entered into their sorrows, and shares them with them. He has seen the affliction, He has heard the cries, He has entered their experience of misery, and now He has 'come down' as their covenant God for the express purpose of delivering them. That is why He is here. Not just to call Moses but to actively deliver His people.

'I am come down.' One from the heavens has come down to take an active interest in covenant activity on earth. The idea is that He has come down to spend some time there so as to bring about their deliverance because of that covenant. The time for inaction is past. The covenant is again coming to the fore.

There is a contrast here of God with Moses. Moses had seen the affliction of his people, his heart had entered into their sorrows, but he had lost control of himself and had had to flee from Egypt. But now it is God who has come down, their covenant God, Yahweh. And he has remained. Now they will be delivered. In this is also expressed His hatred of oppression.

There are times in history when God has 'come down', but not very often. It will happen here. It happened in the days of Elijah and Elisha. It happened supremely in the coming of Jesus and the outreach of the early church. Then amazing things happened for God was here in personal expression of His power. It has happened occasionally in amazing 'revivals'. But it does not happen very often and when it does man has to draw back and God takes over.

'To a good land, and a large land, a land flowing with milk and honey.' A 'large' land, larger

than Goshen with plenty of room, and more, for all His people. A good land for it flows with milk and honey (Numbers 13.27; Deuteronomy 6.3). Milk would flow because there was good pasturage and, apart from in times of famine, plentiful rain. The honey would be from wild bees, (and later domesticated bees, for it was tithed), along with possibly grape and date syrup, and would be plentiful and would later be exported to other countries (Ezekiel 27.17). Thus it provided both nourishment and sweetness. The same description was given of Goshen by the complaining Israelites (Numbers 16.13), but that was partly sarcastic referring the future promise back into the past. Then they had been promised this wonderful land which they had failed to obtain. Well, it seemed to them then in their despair that perhaps Goshen had been like that after all.

The Canaanites and Amorites were terms for the general population of the country and the terms were often interchangeable. Each could be used for the inhabitants of the whole country. However there was sometimes some distinction in that often the Canaanites was the term for those occupying the coastlands and the Jordan valley while the Amorites could be seen as dwelling in the hill country east and west of Jordan. The Hittites may have been settlers who had come from the Hittite Empire further north and had settled in Canaan. Or they may have been longstanding inhabitants of the land (see Genesis 23). The Perizzites were hill dwellers (Joshua 11.3; Judges 1.4 on) and possibly country peasantry, their name being taken from 'peraza', meaning 'hamlet'. This is supported by the fact that they were not named as Canaan's sons in Genesis 10.15 on. They are also omitted in a parallel passage to this in 13.5. The Hivites may have been the equivalent of the Horites (see on Genesis 36). Their principal location was in the Lebanese hills (Judges 3.3) and the Hermon range (Joshua 11.3; 2 Samuel 24.7), but there were some in Edom in the time of Esau (Genesis 36) and in Shechem (Genesis 34). The Jebusites were the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the hills round about (Numbers 13.29; Joshua 11.3; 15.8; 18.16). Thus the population was very mixed and open to invasion and infiltration. The wide range of peoples mentioned, and their spread, emphasises the largeness of the land, and its availability due to its many divisions.

'The cry of the children of Israel has reached me.' That is, will now receive an effective response, because Yahweh was very much aware of the oppression they faced. As He has said earlier He 'knows' it within Himself. This repetitiveness is typical of ancient literature of the time, a device used among other things in order to bring home the facts to the listener. But now comes the telling blow.

3.10 "Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

By now Moses' fear had been lessening as He had learned that this visitation was to inform him of a covenant deliverance of his people, but these words that he was to be the one who was to bring it about must have come as a jolt to Moses. He had been listening and content that Yahweh had come down to do the delivering. But he had not thought that he was to be involved in it. Now he discovered that he was to be right in the forefront of the deliverance and would have to face up to Pharaoh himself.

'I will send you to Pharaoh.' Moses knew all about Pharaoh and his power and his despotism. He did not like the thought of the task at all. Once it might have been vaguely possible when he had been a prince in Egypt and had seemed invulnerable. But now he was simply the son-in-law of a Midianite priest, a desert tribesman, one who would be despised by the Egyptians. And no one was more aware of the high opinion that the Pharaohs had of themselves than Moses.

3.11 'And Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"'

We find here no more the brash young man. He felt rather his inadequacy for the task in hand. After all what was he? A desert nobody in comparison with Pharaoh. And had God forgotten that he was a fugitive? He knew only too well the power of Pharaoh, and his arrogance, and how a Midianite priest's son dressed for the desert would appear to him. He spoke of what he knew. And would the children of Israel think any better of him? A man from the desert? It was hardly likely.

He was yet to recognise that while God could not use a proud son of Pharaoh at the height of his powers who could not control himself, he could use someone who was obedient to him, and had been prepared by Him in His own way, even though in his appearance and standing he was not promising material.

3.12 'And he said, "Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that I have sent you. When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt you will serve God on this mountain."'

So God thrust aside his excuses. He would Himself go with him. 'Certainly I will be with you,' He declared. That was why He had 'come down'. There was One Who would go with Moses, Yahweh their covenant God, Who was more powerful than Pharaoh and all his armies. He was to see that as a guaranteed certainty. He need not therefore be afraid. And this mountain itself was a guarantee, for it was at this very place that there would be blessing.

'This shall be the sign.' The 'sign' was the pledge of God of what was to be. It was a pledge and promise, a sign to be fulfilled after the event. It called for faith. But, if he would, Moses could look around him even now and visualise the hordes of the children of Israel with him while he worshipped God here. Then would he know that he was being sent by God. So what he had to do was to take a step of faith and accept God's word, believing that the promise of God was as good as a certainty, and see it as though it were already happening. He had to trust God 'in the dark'. The mountain was even now there as evidence before him. It was a tangible place to which he would bring the children of Israel. God had made a promise, God could not break His word, therefore the event was sure. And here they would all worship Him. So the sign consisted of God's pledge of what was to happen, and the mountain on which it was to happen. It was an indication that He who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11.6). This was Moses' first major test.

'You will serve God on this mountain.' To 'serve God' was a phrase which meant among other things to lead men in worship and sacrifice. And the need to serve Him would be the basis for the request to leave Egypt (10.8, 11, 24, 26; 12.31). Whenever he later began to doubt whether Pharaoh would ever release the people he could remember this promise. 'You SHALL serve God on this mountain.'

But the next question that occurred to Moses was, would the children of Israel be willing to follow a stranger from Midian? He should of course have gone forward unquestioningly, but God was graciously willing to lead His servant step by step, as He always is.

3.13 'And Moses said to God, "Look, when I come to the children of Israel and will say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you' and they say to me, "What is his name?" What shall I say to them?'

The question seems naive. Surely the statement 'the God of your fathers' will be quite clear. Will they not immediately think of Whoever their fathers had worshipped, the God Whom their fathers had served. So we can be sure of one thing and that is that when Moses says "they will ask 'What is his name?'" he is not thinking that they will mean that as a question spoken by them as indicating that they do not know His name. Rather the question is designed to bring

His name to the fore. Does this stranger from Midian even know His name, but even more, does he know Who He is? Does he know Whose people they are? So Moses is saying, 'make Yourself known to me in greater depth so that I will know what to say to them'.

For to the ancient mind the name indicated the person and personality, it indicated the attributes and abilities, it spoke of what someone was. Thus their real question included the thought, 'Do you know what power and attributes the God of our fathers has that we should believe that He will be able to act through you on our behalf? How can we know that He will, and that He can do what He promises through you? He has not acted for us in the past. He has allowed us to be oppressed and caused to suffer. What new revelation has He given that we should believe Him through you?' And Moses will then have an answer for them.

This is confirmed by the way the question is put. Had it meant, 'what is his name?' literally the question would begin with 'mi'. But it does in fact begin with 'mah' asking about the meaning of the name.

So God took the name that they knew so well, but had probably half forgotten the meaning of, (consider how easily men today can speak of 'the Almighty' without even thinking what it means) so that some had even turned to the gods of Egypt (Joshua 24.14), and He expounded to Moses its significance, so that he could take it to them, and so that they would recognise Him again for what He was. It was the Yahweh Who had brought Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 39.2-3) Who would lead them out again. So they were to fix their thoughts again on the true God.

3.14 'And God said to Moses, "I am what I am." And he said to Moses, "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.' "

To suggest that the children of Israel would have accepted a new name in the place of the old name is frankly incredible. It was rather the old name expanded and fully revealed through this stranger that would speak to their hearts and give them the confidence He was seeking to impart to them. That was why God put His name Yahweh into the first person 'Ehyeh'. It was to Yahweh the God of their fathers He wanted them to look, but as a Yahweh Who had become personal and present. He wanted them to know the full significance of His name. (In Hebrew Yahweh is 'He is' in the third person, Ehyeh is 'I am' in the first person. Both come from the same verbal stem, although the 'w' in Yahweh is an ancient form). He was saying, 'tell them to recall My name. Then they will recognise what I can do!'

'I am what I am.' There are a number of ways of translating this, each of which is significant. 'I am what I am.' 'I am who I am.' 'I will be what I will be.' 'I cause to be what I cause to be.' 'I am the one who is.' It partly depends on what vowels are used (that is, how it was pronounced, for there were minimal vowel signs in ancient Hebrew) and what interpretation is put on it. But as the Hebrews were a people of action rather than abstract thought, we must surely interpret it as meaning 'God does what He wants to do and no one can stop Him', and this is true whichever we favour. It also indicated that there is no other like Him. He is the supreme and only God, the Creator. Before Him the gods of the nations are nothings. That is why they are mentioned so briefly in the whole Exodus narrative (only in 12.12)

In his letters to his subjects Pharaoh would often begin by saying, 'I am there' signifying that in his status as a god nothing could be hidden from him, for he was there with them and could see what they were about. So when Yahweh spoke of Himself as 'I am' He was setting Himself up in contrast to Pharaoh and telling His people that He was the One Who really was there. This fits neatly in with what He has earlier said, 'I have come down.' Thus He was supremely the One Who was there in a new way, and the people could thus be sure that Yahweh was there to act in that new way. They have cried to Him and He was now there to answer their cry. Thus the old name, given new life and meaning, will inspire them to new visions and new

expectancy. They will know it in experience and in action. Yahweh will come to the fore.

For us that name comes with even greater significance. He is the God of the present (I am), the God of the past, the Creator (I cause to be), and the God of the future (I will be), the One Who is, the One Who was and the One Who is to come (Revelation 1.4), the Almighty (Revelation 1.8), the One Who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. The all present and all powerful.

3.15 ‘And God said moreover to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘Yahweh the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name for ever, and my memorial to all generations.’ ”

So the name of the One on Whom they must set all their trust was to be declared to them. Here the name Yahweh is specifically linked to the ‘I am.’ It is represented as the covenant name. He is the One Who guarantees and brings about the covenant promises. YHWH is from a very early form of the verb. Its meaning may be (depending on pronunciation) ‘the One Who is’ referring to His presence and continual activity, ‘the One who will be’ which really says the same but with more emphasis on continuing to be into the future, or ‘the One Who causes to be’ referring to His creative activity and power in the world. He thus wanted them to know that as Yahweh He was now there ready to act for them.

‘The God of your fathers’ (see verse 13). The link with the past is emphasised. Here is the One Who acted for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the One Who made His covenants with them, the One they now worshipped as a nation, even though He might be being sidelined, and to Whom in their despair they had cried, the One Who had previously brought Joseph to Egypt for the succour of His people (Genesis 39.2-3), and could equally well take them out again.

‘Has sent me.’ Moses must reveal himself as one sent by Yahweh to bring about Yahweh’s will as He acts through him. He was to come to them as a messenger from God. We note that while Moses has been in Midian the name Yahweh has not been in use in the record. Now with him being connected with God’s people in the new deliverance the name is introduced. For Yahweh was the God of Israel, not the God of Midian.

‘This is my name for ever.’ In the light of this Yahweh declares Himself to be the unchanging One. He is the same yesterday, today and for ever. Let them therefore remember what He has done in the past in speaking to their fathers, and recognise that He can speak again today, and bring all that was then promised into fulfilment. Yahweh’s activity might have seemed to be in abeyance, but He has remained the same. He is the same Yahweh Who had spoken to their forefathers giving them promises of what would be. They had not then known His delivering power, for they had waited in hope of it in the future. They had had the promise in His name, but they had not seen that promise fulfilled. While experiencing Yahweh, they had not experienced all that that name meant. They had not ‘known His name’. His ‘name’ as representing all that He was and could do, was not yet fully known to them, for His doing was yet in the future. Indeed the revelation of all that that name meant would take for ever, and affect all generations.

‘And my memorial to all generations.’ His name was to remind men of what He has been, and of what He is and of what He can do through the ages, and of what He will be in the future so that He is remembered by it continually. And the great thing that He would now do through Moses would never be forgotten until the end of time.

Moses Is Therefore To Go To The Elders of Israel And Promise A Glorious Deliverance (3.16-22).

- a Moses is to gather the elders and explain that Yahweh the God of their fathers has

- visited them and has seen what is done to them in Egypt (16).
- **b** He will deliver them and bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey (17).
- **c** They must approach Pharaoh and request that they might go into the wilderness to serve their God (18).
- **c** But Yahweh knows that Pharaoh will not allow them to go into the wilderness to serve Him (19).
- **b** Yahweh will then reveal His wonders and smite Egypt and deliver His people so that they will let them go (20).
- **a** The children of Israel will then be favoured by the Egyptians and will despoil them (because of what had been done to them in Egypt (21-22)).

Note the parallels. In 'a' Yahweh has visited His oppressed people, in the parallel they will despoil their oppressors. In 'b' He will deliver them and bring them into a fruitful land, in the parallel He will reveal His wonders in Egypt and cause them to be let go. In 'c' the request for permission to go into the wilderness is paralleled by the fact that Yahweh knows that Pharaoh will not let them go.

3.16-17 'Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them, "Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob has appeared to me saying, 'I have surely visited you and that which is done to you in Egypt. And I have said I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey.'"'

So Moses must approach 'the elders of Israel' with a message from Yahweh, and bring them together to hear it. 'Of Israel' probably refers to the fact that they acted in the place of Jacob, but it is leading up to the eventual solidifying of 'Israel' as the name of the future nation. And he must tell them what he had heard.

'The elders of Israel.' The children of Israel were now run by 'elders'. This was a general term for the lay leaders of a town or city or encampment or other grouping based on the fact that they were usually the older and wiser heads of the group. But not always necessarily so. A prominent or capable younger man could also qualify as 'an elder'. Among the children of Israel these would be the heads of the different branches of the family, the lay aristocracy, although at this stage they probably acted as priests as well, leading the worship of the people, just as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had done. Indeed the elders would continue to be a power even when there was a king with his ministers and priests.

But note that the phrase 'the children of--' has been dropped here. There is the beginning of a general movement towards calling them Israel, partly caused here by the genitive use. (But Pharaoh will also call them 'Israel').

'I have surely visited you and what is done to you.' Yahweh, the one to Whom they had cried as their God, now informs them that He has not in fact forgotten them. Indeed He wants them to know that He has already visited them and entered into the experience of what had been done to them. And during that visitation He has declared to Himself that He will bring them out from their affliction to a land flowing with milk and honey, the land of their forefathers, just as He long ago promised to their forefathers. For the time has now come for the fulfilling of those promises. The verb 'visit' as used here means more than just paying a visit, it signifies a visit which means He is there with a view to action (as we might speak of 'a visitation from God'). His visit will ensure their deliverance. Their God will come truly revealing Himself as Yahweh.

For the land flowing with milk and honey compare verse 8.

3.18 'And they will listen to your voice, and you will come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and you will say to him, "Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us, and now let us go, we pray you, three days journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God."

Moses was assured that the elders would listen to him. They were then to go together to Pharaoh with a request. The first request was to be a reasonable one. That because of a theophany from their God Yahweh they be allowed to make a short journey to the place where He had appeared (the wilderness, not necessarily the exact site) in order to offer sacrifices to Him.

'Yahweh the God of the Hebrews.' Pharaoh would take this to mean the Habiru god, a strange, wild God of no fixed abode apart from the desert. To Pharaoh the children of Israel were Habiru, a former stateless and landless people. Thus he would see their God in the same way. But to Moses and the elders 'Hebrews' was possibly more specific, it probably signified in their minds the God of those who claimed descent from Eber. (See [Hebrews](#)). The God Who was the God of their history.

'Has met with us.' They were to acknowledge the revelation to Moses as being a revelation to His people. They were to declare that He had met with their representative Moses, this Midianite stranger from God who was related to them, calling them to meet with Him in His mountain.

'Three days journey.' A standard phrase signifying a relatively short journey of a few days, well within range of Egypt and in land under Egypt's 'protection'.

'The wilderness.' As the God of a stateless and landless people this would be seen by the Egyptians as a suitable venue for such worship, a venue off the soil of Egypt where, in the view of the Egyptians, the gods of Egypt held sway. And there they could offer sacrifices without offending the Egyptians. Furthermore it was where the theophany with Moses had taken place and therefore a suitable place for response in worship. As their God was clearly a God of the wilderness, and had appeared there, that was clearly where He should be worshipped. (This is again looking from Pharaoh's point of view)

This was not an unreasonable request. Religion was recognised to be central to the lives of all people. Even slaves were thus seen as entitled to worship their gods in accordance with that god's requirements, and would expect to be given time off for the purpose. It was recognised that their gods had to be respected. Who knew otherwise what might happen? In view of the outstanding nature of the theophany many a king would happily have agreed to this request. But the people were many and this Pharaoh felt superior to their God, and he did not want to lose them. The request, while therefore not totally unreasonable, was yet unlikely to be agreed to.

In the British Museum there is an Egyptian record which shows the entries of an overseer of the labourers and he lists the number of absent workmen. Reasons are given for absence such as illness, or the illness of a man's wife or one of his children, and there are various explanations given. Others were that some workmen were idle, or that they were pious and remained away from work because they wanted to sacrifice to their gods. The latter would not be frowned on as long as it was not overdone. A man's gods were seen as very important to his wellbeing and would contribute to the wellbeing of the land.

3.19 "And I know that the king of Egypt will not give you leave to go, no, not by a mighty hand."

But Yahweh was aware that Pharaoh would refuse. He knew Pharaoh's heart only too well. Pharaoh would thus himself be made to recognise that he was setting himself up against Yahweh, but would foolishly feel that he could do so with impunity. If the consequences were detrimental therefore he would have only himself to blame.

'No, not by a mighty hand.' Even though the One Who seeks their worship is strong and mighty it would make no difference. Pharaoh will see himself as mightier. He will consider that his hand is mightier than the hand of Yahweh. LXX translates 'even though compelled by a mighty hand' (see 6.1; 13.3, 9, 14, 16).

3.20 "And I will put forth my hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst of it, and after that he will let you go."

But though Pharaoh may have begun the battle it will be Yahweh Who will be victorious and finish it. It will be a matter of the god Pharaoh, and all the gods of Egypt, against Yahweh but He will totally defeat them by His wonders (12.12). And defeated and humbled, Pharaoh, representative of all those gods, will therefore eventually submit and let them go. At this stage Moses could not even begin to conceive of those wonders, nor of how long it would be before Pharaoh was persuaded. But he had to accept by faith that God would do as He had said, and persevere. We should note, however, in saying this that the gods of Egypt are rarely mentioned in the narrative and are kept continually in the background. God will not give them recognition even for a moment, until His final judgment (12.12) when their total inability to prevent Yahweh's activity will be revealed in the smiting of all the firstborn in Egypt, including the firstborn in the house of Pharaoh, with his false claim to godhood.

But in saying this let not Moses think that His people will leave Egypt as an impoverished rabble. Rather they will leave with pride and loaded with spoils.

3.21-22 "And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. And it will thus happen that when you go, you will not go empty. But every woman shall ask of her neighbour, and of her who lodges in her house, jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and clothing, and you will put them on your sons and on your daughters, and you will spoil the Egyptians."

For their Egyptian neighbours will be so pleased and relieved to see them go to worship their God that they will give them anything that they ask for. They will pile jewels and clothing on them so as to satisfy their God. And thus will His people receive the spoils of what will be Yahweh's great victory. It is after all the victor who receives the spoils. Note that they were to 'ask', possibly as a contribution to the worship of Yahweh. They had no power to demand. It would be up to the Egyptians what they gave. But the situation will be such that they will give gladly and bountifully. So will God be honoured in the eyes of the Egyptians.

It should be noted that the parallel verse in the analysis explains that this is in return for how they have been treated in Egypt.

There is no thought here that the Egyptians would receive their goods back. They would be fully aware that what was given to a deity remained with that deity in His treasure house or equivalent (fitting in with whatever the customs of these Israelites might be). The description goes beyond just vessels used for worship.

So Yahweh depicted the forthcoming battle in terms of the coming day when they would finally receive permission to go and worship. For a while Pharaoh would challenge and insult Yahweh by refusing to let His people worship Him, but finally Yahweh will bring about their release by His power. And no one in that day will be able to dispute that this was reasonable, for Yahweh had a right to the worship of His people, and it was that that had quite wrongly been refused to

them.

It should be noted that the request to worship is not to be seen as a subterfuge to enable their escape. It is a genuine request so as to put Pharaoh in the wrong. They were simply to ask to fulfil the demands of their God, and that was to be their intent. Then they must trust Him as to what would happen next. And in the end, although they did not know it or know how it would be, it would be Pharaoh's belligerence that would finally justify their permanent flight. Once he had set out to attack them with his army and had failed he had himself guaranteed their non-return. The whole position was known to God from beginning to end.

Note how freely the Israelites were mingled among the Egyptians. The Egyptians lived next door to them, and they even lodged in their houses. Their slavery was not such that they did not have a certain amount of limited freedom. It was just that each day they were dragged off to hard labour for which they received little in return, so that they could not see to their flocks and herds, such as they were.

(Note to Christians.

There is a sense in which Moses is a type of Jesus. As God met Moses at the burning bush, so does God meet with us through the One Whose face is like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1.16 compare Matthew 17.2). John could say, 'we beheld His glory' (John 1.14) and we by faith may be aware of that glory as He speaks to us through His word as the Light of the world (John 8.12) and calls us first to follow Him, and then to walk in the way that He shows us. Through Moses came God's revelation of Himself to His people through His name, but even greater is the revelation that has come to us in Christ (2 Corinthians 4. 4-6). Thus we are without excuse if we fail to follow Him fully.

And just as the elders and the people believed when Moses and Aaron came to them, so do we easily believe when times are good. But let the testing times come, and how is it with us then? For Israel would be greatly tested before they were finally delivered.

End of note.)

Moses Continues To Object To God's Request And God Gives Him Three Signs (4.1-9).

Moses continued to express his doubts so God told him of three signs which he would be able to use in order to demonstrate his credentials. The first deals with a snake, the symbol of much religious belief in Egypt, and a reminder to Israel of the Tempter in the Garden.

The First Sign - The Rod Turned Into A Snake (4.1-5).

- a Moses says that the people will not believe his voice or that Yahweh has appeared to him (1).
- b Yahweh draws attention to the staff in his hand (2).
- c He is to cast it to the ground and it becomes a snake (3a).
- c Moses flees from before it and Yahweh says 'take it by the tail' (3b-4a).
- b He puts forth his hand and it becomes a staff in his hand (4b).
- a Then the people will believe and accept that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, has appeared to him (5).

Note that in 'a' Moses says that the people will not believe his voice or that Yahweh has appeared to him, in the parallel Yahweh confirms that they will do both. In 'b' Yahweh draws attention to the staff in his hand, in the parallel the resulting snake becomes a staff in his hand. In 'c' he casts his staff to the ground and it becomes a snake, and in the parallel he flees before

it and is told to take it by the tail.

4.1 'And Moses answered and said, "But look, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, "Yahweh has not appeared to you."

Moses now comes up with his third objection. He had pleaded inability (3.11) and that the people would want to know by Whose power he came (3.13), and now he simply states that they will not believe that Yahweh has appeared to him. After all, why should they? And given their situation, and the continual unbelief they would reveal, his objection certainly had substance. But it still demonstrated a lack of faith that later generations would not have imputed to the great Moses. This is genuine tradition.

Note that the use of 'Yahweh' is now predominant. He is coming very much as the God of the covenant.

4.2-3 'And Yahweh said, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff.' And he said, "Throw it on the ground." And it became a snake, and Moses fled from it.'

Moses staff was something with which he was familiar, an old friend, and he knew how to defend himself with it. It would also be a symbol of his authority. So God uses something familiar and important with which to do something unfamiliar. He tells him to throw it in the ground, and when he does so it becomes a snake. This first sign would be reproduced by the Egyptian magicians by trickery for they were famous with what they could do with snakes. But there was no trickery here. For when Moses saw the snake he 'fled from it', that is backed away to a safe distance. He knew what some snakes could do. He was not practising a conjuring trick.

One root meaning of the consonants for 'snake' (nachash) is 'enchantment'. The snake was feared for its insidious behaviour, striking from its hiding place when suddenly disturbed, biting at a horse's heels (Genesis 49.17), and it was commonly used in enchantments, and symbolised the world of the gods in which snakes were a common feature, sometimes good and sometime bad. The Egyptians believed in the sacred uraeus-snake as a symbol of protection, often on Pharaoh's brow leading him to victory in battle. They also believed in the serpent 'Apep as the symbol of evil. Thus to have power over such snakes was to have power over good and evil.

But to Israel the snake represented something more. It represented the traditional enemy of God (Genesis 3). Here it would be demonstrated that the one represented by the snake had been mastered by God. This is another example of the repetition of events in early Genesis in this book. They would recognise that it was indeed Yahweh Who had spoken to Moses because of his power over the snake in accordance with their traditions.

4.4 'And Yahweh said to Moses, "Put out your hand and take it by the tail." And he put out his hand and took hold of it and it became a staff in his hand.'

Yahweh then told Moses to take the snake by the tail. This required great faith and courage, for the tail is the last part of a snake that you would take hold of, for it enables it to turn and bite. But, after his initial fear, he recognised that this was no ordinary snake, and was all Yahweh's doing, and that he could therefore safely do what He said. If Yahweh told him to do it, Yahweh could render the snake powerless. So he did what he was told. He did not seek to bruise its head he took it by the tail. And as soon as he did the snake once more became a staff in his hand.

So Moses learned not to fear 'the snake' and all that it symbolised of Pharaoh and of other-

world powers, for he now knew that God controlled the snake. This was his first practical step in trusting God. And he had learned by it not to be afraid of the Serpent who lay behind it all, or of the Pharaoh whose head bore the snake. And he could demonstrate to Israel that they need not be afraid either.

There was presumably significance in the fact that he was to tackle the snake in this unusual way. The usual tactic would be to go for the head. One reason probably was in order to show the complete control that Yahweh had over the snake, and therefore over all snakes both human and divine. Another was possibly to give the hint that victory would not be instantaneous or accomplished violently. It would be achieved by a firm hand.

But a further purpose may have been to prevent the idea that this was the fulfilment of Genesis 3.15. This was not to be the final subjection of the Evil One, it was to be a preliminary subjection.

4.5 'That they may believe that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.'

Many see a difficulty here in knowing what the 'that' refers back to. It may well in fact assume that the reader in his mind adds an introduction in thought of words such as 'you will do this with your rod so (that) --'. However, it might equally refer back to 'take it by the tail', with the remainder (from the modern point of view) in parenthesis. Moses' action with the snake would be in accordance with their own longstanding tradition about what had happened in Eden. Our problem may simply arise from our lack of knowledge of the idioms of early Hebrew. Either way the meaning is clear. Moses must show this sign to the elders and the people so that they would believe that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, had indeed appeared to them, and could control the enemies of Israel as he had with their first father in Eden.

Note the continued emphasis on 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (3.15, 16 and here). The intention is to bolster both Moses and the people with the fact that the God of the covenant, the God of their past, was now here to fulfil His promises made to those great men of the past, the promises which Israel had been brought up with from their cradles. It is precisely because Yahweh is the God of their fathers that they can have such confidence. He is their own God.

The Second Sign - The Leprous Hand (4.6-8).

It was with his hand that Moses had smitten the taskmaster whom he had murdered. Now he was to be made to recognise that it was defiled, and needed purifying by Yahweh. But to Israel it would signify that although they were defiled in God's eyes through idolatry and sin, he was now seeking to cleanse them and deliver them.

- a Yahweh tells him to put his hand in his bosom (6a).
- b He puts his hand in his bosom and it becomes leprous (6b).
- b He is told to put his hand in his bosom again and it becomes as his flesh (7).
- a If they will not believe the first sign this latter sign will cause them to believe (8).

Here in 'a' Moses puts his hand, the hand of God which has rendered the snake powerless, in his bosom, the seat of his life and affections, to his very heart, symbolising the relationship between himself and God. And in the parallel as a result of what occurs in the hand becoming leprous and then being healed, a symbol of his deliverance from a diseased situation, they will believe that the God Who has brought them to their situation will also deliver them from it. In 'b' his hand becomes leprous and in the parallel it becomes whole again.

4.6 'And Yahweh said further to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." And he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous, like snow.'

The second thing that Moses was to do as a sign was to put his hand within his cloak 'into his bosom'. Then, when he withdrew it, it would be seen by all to be leprous. They would see in the leprosy the mark of God and of what He could do in smiting men, and restoring them. Their position had no doubt made them feel that they were cursed by God, and there was reason for them to do so for many of them were dallying with the gods of Egypt (Joshua 24.15). Here was open evidence that that curse could be removed.

But why should his hand placed in his bosom say this to them? We should note that the hand that he was to put into his bosom would just earlier have taken the snake by the tail and turned it into a staff. Thus while he might see it as branding him as a murderer they would see it as the prophet's hand of power by which the one whom the snake represented could be defeated. (Later he will raise his hand in order to do wonders). Thus when he pointedly put it in his bosom He was thereby indicating to them his own history, that because of the attitude of his heart the hand of God in him had previously been made useless and 'unclean' by God, but that now it had been restored and God was with him. Its becoming leprous and being restored again may well have been seen by them as an indication that Moses, God's hand, whom they had believed as lost, was now restored by God to fulfil His purposes.

It may well too have been a sign that God saw their hearts as sinful so that on recognising that God was coming to them as they were, they gained in confidence that he would save them.

'Leprosy', (in Hebrew the word covers many diseases of the skin), was a particularly dreaded disease. It was seen as being a curse from God, and often incurable. It often rendered a person permanently 'unclean' and therefore unable to approach God. (It was not always leprosy as we know it. They did not, of course, distinguish clearly between various kinds of skin disease. Thus some skin diseases would eventually heal, which explains later legislation). And this kind that Moses had was particularly virulent as was shown by the effect, it made his hand white as snow, an effect produced by certain types of skin disease. Perhaps there was here a hint of the mark ('sign') of Cain (Genesis 4.15) which may well have been seen as some similar disfigurement. For the sign on the hand see 13.9, 16 where a sign on the hand was later considered important for Yahweh's people. Then it would be a sign of response and obedience. Here therefore it might well indicate the 'curing' of their disobedience.

4.7 'And he said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." And he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold it was turned again as his other flesh.'

First the giving and then the healing of this severe skin disease would be a clear indication to all that it was God Who was at work, for such severe skin diseases were uniquely seen as within the prerogative of God (Numbers 12.10; 2 Samuel 3.29; 2 Kings 15.5; 2 Chronicles 26.20-21). They learned by this the important lesson, that God could make something loathsome, but that He could also make it clean. God could smite and He could heal. He had done it for Moses. He could do it for them. And just as the snake had symbolised hidden powers of evil, so we may see the healing of the leprosy as indicating God's power to control and deal with all that was loathsome so that he could attack men and their ability to act, and then restore them as he would. And if they did see it as representing the mark of Cain on the man in the wilderness they would recognise by this that that mark had in Moses' case been removed. Although they might have thought he was marked by his Midianite background, this would demonstrate that he was not marked by God as separated from the people of God or as a murderer. For whatever he was God had made him whole. Thus his God-empowered hand was there to deliver.

Furthermore if the snake represented the powers against which they were arrayed, the hand represented Moses' own power and ability as bestowed by God. By himself he was weak and diseased, but let his hand be conjoined with a heart that was right and all would be well. Then God would use his hand.

4.8 "And it will happen that, if they will not believe you, or listen to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the latter sign."

The second sign will give good reason why the people will believe in the face of two signs. Two witnesses should be accepted as valid evidence.

The Third Sign - Water From The Nile Turned To Blood (4.9).

This sign could not be enacted immediately as Moses was not near the Nile. It is, however, an indication by Yahweh that He will demonstrate His power over the gods of Egypt as soon as Moses arrives there. The Nile god was seen as one of Egypt's greatest gods, responsible for much of its prosperity. If Yahweh could make him bleed He could do anything..

- He is to take water from the Nile and pour it on the dry land (9a).
- The water taken from the Nile will become blood on the dry land (9b).

4.9 "And it will happen that if they will not believe even these two signs, nor listen to your voice and accept it, that you will take of the water of the Nile and pour it on the dry land, and the water which you take out of the Nile will become blood on the dry land."

Note the reversal of the order even in such a short sentence.

- a If they will not believe his voice ---
- b He is to take of the water of the Nile ---
- c And pour it on the dry land
- b And the water which he takes out of the Nile ---
- a Will become blood on the dry land.'

There is actually an interesting twofold pattern here. A combination of chiasmus, and of repetition (of 'on the dry land'). Interesting examples appear of this in Numbers where a chiasmus also contains within its latter part a deliberate repetition (see Numbers 18.4, 7 within the chiasmus 18.1-7; and 18.23, 24 within the chiasmus 18.21-24).

But what of those who will believe neither sign? God is aware of the deep unbelief of men and He was willing to make allowances for it. So He provided Moses with a third sign. Some will, of course, believe after the first sign by the controlling of the snake, others will believe after the second sign when the power of God to smite and heal has been revealed, but the third sign was for the severe doubters. Two signs confirm the certainty that God is at work (two is the number of witness). The third demonstrates a complete revelation (three is the number of completeness).

Moses was not called on to test this sign out there and then. There was no river available. But its significance was clear. Yahweh could make the powerful Nile god bleed. The water of the mighty Nile god, that water which was the very life of the people, could be turned by Him into blood. It was a symbol of what Yahweh could do to the Nile and to Egypt. It warned that if the Egyptians would not do what God demanded their future would be saturated in blood, for the Nile symbolised Egypt (Jeremiah 46.8 compare Isaiah 7.18). He would 'slay' the Nile and with it many of the people of the Nile god who had claimed so many Israelite victims at their hands.

Note on the Possible Parallels Between Exodus 1-4 and Genesis 1-4.

If we were to draw attention to the striking elements in the early chapters of Genesis they would certainly include the river that went through Eden and watered it, (Genesis 2.10-14 - which was like the Nile that went through Egypt and watered it), the snake (Genesis 3), the penalty of toil and of pain in childbirth resulting from disobedience (Genesis 3.16-19), the murderer who fled into the 'land of wandering (nod)' (Genesis 4.16), the mark placed on that murderer by God (Genesis 4.15) and his building of a city (Genesis 4.17), the emphasis on the inevitable death of all men (Genesis 5), the deliverance through the ark (Genesis 6.14-8.22), and the multiplication of the peoples (Genesis 10). It is surely too much of a coincidence that all these motifs also appear in Exodus 1-4.

The three 'signs' given to Moses possibly connect with the snake, the 'sign' of Cain, and the river which fed a fruitful land, all connected with their first traditions, while as we have seen earlier there has been an emphasis on the laborious toil of the people of Israel, the sad pain on their childbearing, their building of cities, deliverance of one through an ark, and the fleeing of a murderer into the wilderness. It is difficult in view of this to avoid the thought that the writer has the traditions behind Genesis 1-11 in his mind, forced on him by the remarkable parallels (history continually repeats itself through the ages). Add to this the comparative pictures of the rapid expansion of populations in Genesis 5, 10 and 11 with those in Exodus 1 and the situation appears to be confirmed.

We can also note how the early chapters of Genesis also seem to underlie the distinctions between clean and unclean in Leviticus 11 (see our commentary on that chapter). The traditions of the early chapters of Genesis clearly lay at the root of the thinking of whoever wrote these words, as root ideas which are built into history.

End of note.

Moses Continues His Resistance And Yahweh Becomes Angry (4.10-17).

Moses is naturally appalled at the hugeness of the responsibility that Yahweh is seeking to place on him and desperately tries to avoid taking it on. But Yahweh has prepared him precisely for this and is adamant, and in the end even angry..

- a Moses protests that he is not capable for the task in hand because he is not eloquent (10).
- b Yahweh replies that it is He who has made man's mouth and Who makes man dumb (and otherwise) (11).
- c He commands Moses to go and promises that He will be with his mouth and teach him what to speak (12).
- d Moses indirectly asks Him to use someone else (he is not rejoicing) (13).
- d Yahweh is angry and points out that Aaron the Levite is coming to meet him and will rejoice to see him (14).
- c Moses is to put words in his mouth, and Yahweh will be with both their mouths and will teach him what to do (15).
- b Aaron will be to Moses a mouth and Moses will be to him as God (16).
- a He must take his staff in his hand with which he will do the signs (17).

The parallel in 'a' suggest that although he is not eloquent the signs will do the talking. In 'b' the one Who has made man's mouth in the parallel provides Moses with a mouth. In 'c' Yahweh's promise made will be fulfilled in the parallel by Him being with both their mouths, but Moses will be in charge. In 'd' Yahweh is upset at his intransigence but points out that He has already made provision for it.

4.10-12 'And Moses said to Yahweh, "Oh Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before or since you have spoken to your servant, for I am slow of speech and do not have a ready tongue (am of slow tongue)." And Yahweh said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes dumb, or deaf, or sighted or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say."

Moses continued to seek to avoid his unwelcome assignment. This time he argued that he was no good at refined conversation. In those days eloquence was looked on as vital in diplomacy, and requests, submissions and arguments were seen as needing to be couched in flowery language. Thus Moses felt that he was not suitable. Through living with the Midianites he felt that he had long since lost any ability he had to be flowery in his speech like a diplomat. He was now a rough and ready tribesman. And he knew that meeting Yahweh had not improved the situation.

Yahweh's reply was to point to Who was behind Moses. Does he not recognise that He is the One controls all man's functions? He could therefore enable Moses and show him what to say. But Moses was still reluctant. He was too aware of his inability in that field, and besides, he did not like the whole idea. His next words make that clear.

4.13 'And he said, "Oh Lord, send, I pray you, by the hand of him whom you will send."

In view of the response this clearly indicated a polite refusal. His plea is that Yahweh must choose someone else. (Moses was eloquent enough here). He may choose whom He would, but not Moses.

4.14-15 'And the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Moses, and he said, "Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he comes out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart. And you will 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." '

This description is in human terms. God's 'anger' is the divine response to disobedience, unwillingness and lack of faith, not a sign of lack of control. It depicts His condemnation of and aversion to sin. (There is no ready human word for it, for it is outside our experience). But His response was measured and compassionate. He pointed out that Aaron, Moses' brother, was eloquent. He was already bringing him out to meet Moses and then he could act as his spokesman. But Moses must take final responsibility. It was Moses who was God's chosen spokesman. It should be noted that God had already anticipated Moses' reaction and had graciously made provision for it. He is not unaware of the weakness of His servants. His anger contains within it understanding.

'The Levite.' This is the first use of the term. 'The sons of Levi' are becoming 'the Levites', personal relationship is becoming tribal relationship. Aaron, like Moses, was descended from Levi, and the comment may probably not be intended to illuminate Moses so much as the reader, as a reminder that both Moses and Aaron are of the tribe of Levi. (In 6.16-19 the term 'the Levites' is clearly equated with 'the sons of Levi' and is not otherwise obviously technical). Or it may here also indicate that Aaron was the head of the tribe of Levi, or an outstanding person within it.

It has been asked whether God would need to tell Moses that Aaron was a Levite if it just meant that he was descended from Levi, but then we could ask, would he need to tell him that he was his brother? The simplest answer is as we have said above. It was explanatory to the reader. However in both cases it may be that Moses might know of other Aarons who were related to him and could be called 'brother' (a term with a fairly wide meaning) and thus that

'the Levite' would be seen as distinguishing him from the others.

Another possibility is that Aaron, as a result of his eloquence, had become known by reputation as 'Aaron the Levite' and that God was referring to that fact. This would then require that Moses had had some previous contact with his family, which was of course quite possible. He would not have spent all that time in Midian without seeking to get in touch with his family. There is no evidence elsewhere for the term to be an official designation at this early stage.

'Behold, he comes out to meet you.' God would now arrange for Aaron to come to meet Moses (see verse 27). This could indicate that He had already done so, or alternatively that it was already seen as accomplished in His mind.

'When he sees you he will be glad at heart.' Moses need have no fear. Their meeting would be a joyous one. They had not met for many long years, and Aaron must have wondered how his princely brother was faring. Messages communicated by others were all very well, but they did not tell the whole story. Now he would know and their meeting would make him pleased and delighted.

'And you will speak to him and put the words in his mouth.' Aaron was to become the spokesman, but Moses must still decide what would be said. He was to be in overall control. And God would guide them both.

4.16 "And he shall be your spokesman to the people, and it shall be that he will be to you a mouth and you will be to him as God."

Literally 'he will be to you a mouth.' The background to these words is clearly Egyptian. There "mouth" (ra) is used metaphorically for a representative of Pharaoh. The office of a "mouth" was so important that it was held by the highest State dignitaries. The titles "mouth" and "chief mouth" were used in relation to people such as chief superintendents and overseers of public works who acted as intermediaries between the Pharaoh and the Government officials. The concept of "mouth" or "chief mouth" involved a confidential and exalted position at court, ranking immediately after the king. They were mouths to a god.

'And you will be to him as God.' Possibly better 'as a god', that is, as standing in God's place. As Pharaoh's 'mouths' spoke for him as a god, so Aaron will parallel these high officials and speak in the name of Moses. As Yahweh will say to Moses later, "I will make you a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 7.1)." Pharaoh would indeed learn to fear him and his seemingly divine powers. This puts Pharaoh's 'divinity' firmly on an earthen plane. The battle would be between Moses and Pharaoh, not between Pharaoh and God.

4.17 'And you will take in your hand this staff with which you will perform the signs.'

This refers to the staff of Moses (verse 2). As 'God' he will speak by performing signs. From now on this staff, which will have delivered God's first sign, (and is here linked also with the other signs) will be called 'the staff of God' (verse 20). It will be with Moses, and often used by Aaron, in all his future activities, a reminder that the power of Yahweh was with him and that his authority was derived from God, and that thereby he could control the snake, and smite and heal. It was a visible evidence of God's presence with him, and through it he would soon perform many other signs.

Moses Leaves Midian For Egypt (4.18-20).

This is a section of powerful contrasts. On the one hand Jethro is Moses' tribal leader with

acknowledged rights (18a), on the other Yahweh demands lordship over Moses and his family, represented by the sign of circumcision. On the one hand Pharaoh is threatening Yahweh's firstborn son, and in return Yahweh threatens Pharaoh's firstborn son, meanwhile Moses is also seen as under threat because his son has not been circumcised which would be the sign that he was one of God's chosen people. Equally powerful is the parallel contrast that while those who are in Egypt who threatened Moses' life are dead, Yahweh will seek to slay Moses, something only averted by the blood of circumcision. We are reminded that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10.31)

This brings out what serious issues were seen as involved here. The major questions were two, firstly as to whom Moses owed authority, that was why the circumcision of his son was so important. This may suggest that his wife was refusing to allow her son to be circumcised out of loyalty to her own tribe, and was reminding Moses of his tribal obligations. Once she agreed to the circumcision the issue was resolved, which may have been why she was so angry at being thwarted. The second issue was the vital importance to Yahweh of the deliverance of Israel, His son, His firstborn, which not even Moses must be allowed to frustrate. When it came to sons Yahweh's was of premier importance.

Analysis of the passage:

- a Moses requests of Jethro, his tribal leader, the right to visit his family in Egypt (18a).
- b Jethro tells him to 'go in peace' (18b).
- c Yahweh tells Moses to return to Egypt because those who sought his life were dead (19).
- d Moses takes his wife and sons and sets out to return to the land of Egypt (unaware of the threat that is looming over himself and his son) (20a).
- e Moses takes the staff of God *in his hand* (20b).
- e Yahweh tells Moses to be sure that he performs before Pharaoh all the wonders which Yahweh has *put in his hand*, but Yahweh will harden his heart so that he will not let them go (21).
- d He is to say to Pharaoh that Israel is His firstborn son, but because Pharaoh will refuse to let his firstborn son go He will slay Pharaoh's firstborn son (22-23).
- c On his way to his lodging Yahweh meets Moses and seeks to kill him (it is in Midian that his life is threatened because Yahweh is angry at his divided loyalties) (24).
- b Zipporah circumcises his son and casts the foreskin at his feet saying, 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me, Yahweh then leaves him alone (he can go in peace) (25-26a).
- a She said a bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision (which is a sign which demonstrates that he is bound to Yahweh and not to his tribal leader) (26b).

Here the parallels are interesting. In 'a' Moses requests of Jethro, his tribal leader, the right to visit his family in Egypt, while in the parallel he is rather to be bound to Yahweh through the Abrahamic covenant by circumcision, a situation sealed by blood. In 'b' Jethro tells him to go in peace, while in the parallel he finds peace from the anger of Yahweh through the shedding of blood and the circumcision of his son. In 'c' Yahweh tells Moses to return to Egypt (as Yahweh's man) because those who sought his life were dead, while in the parallel his life is under threat because Yahweh still lives and is being ignored by him so that he prefers to remain Midian's man. In 'd' Moses takes his wife and sons and sets out to return to the land of Egypt (unaware of the threat that is looming over them because of his son), while in the parallel in coming to Egypt he is to face Pharaoh with the fact that Israel is His firstborn son, and because Pharaoh will refuse to let his firstborn son go He will slay Pharaoh's firstborn son. In 'e' Moses takes the staff of God in his hand, and in the parallel Yahweh tells Moses to be sure that he performs before Pharaoh all the wonders which Yahweh has put in his hand (through the staff of God), but Yahweh will harden his heart so that he will not let them go.

4.18 'And Moses went and returned to Yether, his in-law, and said to him, "Let me go, I pray you, and return to my kinsmen ('brothers') who are in Egypt and see whether they are still alive." And Yithro said to Moses, "Go in peace."

In Genesis 49.4 'yether' signifies having the pre-eminence. Thus the name Jethro (Yether, Yithro as above) may be Reuel's title as either tribal leader or priest. It was to him in his official capacity that Moses came for he wished to absent himself from the tribe to see whether his kinsmen were still alive. He did not tell him the real reason for his going. Had he done so his father-in-law might not have been so willing to see him go, and Moses clearly did not consider that a theophany from Yahweh had anything to do with Jethro who was a priest of the god of Midian. Had Jethro known of Yahweh Moses would surely have told him a lot more, for then Yahweh's command would have been significant to Jethro and of great importance. This counts against Jethro even knowing of Yahweh, except possibly as Moses' strange personal and family God.

The fact that Moses' son (possibly his firstborn is in mind, although we might then have expected it to be stated) had not been circumcised might suggest divided loyalties by Moses between obedience to Yahweh and response to his current circumstances, indicating resistance from his wife and possibly his family and tribe with regard to his loyalty to Yahweh and what they saw as a barbarous rite of circumcision. What follows settles once and for all where the loyalty of he and his family must lie.

It is equally possible the Reuel had died and that Jethro his brother-in-law is in mind. Either way the point is that 'Yether' (Jethro) was leader of the family tribe. he had to be consulted. Tribal loyalty was seen as extremely important and no tribe liked to be diminished by losing a valuable member. He could not just go off at will. On the other hand family loyalty was seen as equally important, so permission was unlikely to be refused.

Jethro acknowledged his right to visit his kinsfolk and gave consent. 'Go in peace.' He was assuring him that there would be no dispute or ill will in the tribe at his departure. Later when the deliverance had taken place Moses would keep Jethro informed of events and Jethro would come to visit him and acknowledge his responsibility to accompany the people he had delivered to Canaan (18.1-27). Thus Moses did what was fitting towards his tribe.

But Yahweh would only say 'go in peace' to Moses once the issue of his loyalties had been settled by the circumcision of his son (possibly his firstborn for each son individually spoken of in this passage is a firstborn).

4.19 'And Yahweh said to Moses in Midian, "Go, return to Egypt, for all the men who sought your life are dead."

Some time had passed since his call, for he had had to bring the sheep back to the tribe and then seek the right time to prepare to visit Egypt, and as we know he was not at all keen on the idea. Besides, haste would not have been looked on as courteous. But then the word came from Yahweh that it was time to depart, both forcefully and yet with comfort. Initially, he is reminded, he will have nothing to fear, for those who remembered his misdeed were no more. Note the stress on 'in Midian'. Yahweh can speak anywhere.

But in context in the background is another threat of death. Yahweh Himself will threaten him with death because of his failure in loyalty (verse 24).

4.20 'And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them on an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.'

Moses took his family with him and set off. By now he had 'sons'. His wife and sons seemingly rode on an ass, while he walked with them. 'He returned to the land of Egypt.' We would say 'and he began his journey back to Egypt', but we have seen this method (of summarising prior to giving the detail) before, in Genesis.

'And Moses took the staff of God in his hand.' He knew that this was the sign of his God-given authority and his one weapon against the wisdom and armies of Egypt. Now it was not just his staff, it was the staff of God.

The Three Sons (4.21-26).

This section could be described as the heart of the book of Exodus, for it deals with three attitudes that lie at the heart of God's dealings with the world: with Israel, with Pharaoh and with each individual. It takes up three aspects of sonship and faces us up with a choice, for all of us must decide whose sons we will be. And the passage centralises on Yahweh's attitude towards these three sons.

The first sonship relates to Yahweh Himself. In verse 22 He declares true Israel's relationship with Him. He declares, 'Israel is my son, my firstborn.' What amazing words were these. They depicted God's love for Israel as being like a father's love for his firstborn son. He was declaring that they had become so precious to Him that He had adopted them as His firstborn. It was they who were chosen to receive His inheritance. It is this concept that lies at the root of all that will follow. In His sovereign power He has elected to make them His son (compare Deuteronomy 7.6-8; 14.1; 1.31 also Exodus 19.5-6). And the corollary was, woe betide those who failed to treat His firstborn son rightly. It should, however, be noted that here it is Israel as a whole which is His son, Israel as He intended it to be. It was on them that He had set His love.

In contrast with Yahweh's firstborn is the firstborn of Pharaoh (verse 23). Here was one whom Pharaoh treasured, and who was paraded as a budding god, one who was the delight of Egypt. And Pharaoh was to be warned that if he did not deal rightly with Yahweh's firstborn, his own firstborn would be slain. Behind this warning lies the very basis on which the world exists. The world as represented by Egypt is responsible for its response to God and His people. And if the world does not respond rightly then it can only come into judgment, and will be punished like for like.

But there is a third son brought into the reckoning, and that is Moses' own son, although he is not said to be his firstborn, even if in context it might be assumed. And here was the problem. Moses' son had not been circumcised. He was not marked as belonging to God, and because of this was 'cut off' from the people of God (Genesis 17.14). He was not a part of God's firstborn son. And it demonstrated Moses' divided loyalty. Here was a paradox indeed. On the one hand he was the son of God's chosen servant, on the other he was aligned with those who were not of God because he had not circumcised his son. This could not be allowed to continue and explains the severity of the passage. Moses had to choose to Whom his son and his family would belong. Would they belong inside the covenant or outside it? Behind the passage lies a message to us all. Whose son will we choose to be? And by our response will be determined our destiny.

4.21-23 'And Yahweh said to Moses, "When you go back into Egypt see that you do before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your hand, but I will make his heart strong and he will not let the people go. And you will say to Pharaoh, 'Israel is my son, my firstborn, and I have said to you let my son go that he may serve me. And you have refused to let him go. Behold I will slay your son, your firstborn.' " ' "

Yahweh now let Moses know what was in store for him. He told him that he must begin by showing Pharaoh the wonders that he would first have shown to the elders of the children of Israel. That was why he had brought with him the rod of God. But Yahweh would give Pharaoh strength of heart to resist so that he would refuse to let them go to worship Yahweh. It will, however, be noticed later that at first Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The divine will and the human purpose went along in parallel. It was only later, once Pharaoh had proved his obduracy, that God's action was more direct.

Then he must issue him with a dire warning. He must tell him that Israel is to Yahweh like a firstborn son, beloved and treasured, and that because he has refused them permission to go to worship Him and offer sacrifices to Him in the wilderness He will slay Pharaoh's firstborn in return. If he sought to break Yahweh's heart, Yahweh would break his heart. This will be a direct challenge to Pharaoh's deity. He may see himself as a god, as may his people, but the assertion is that he will not be able to protect his son, also a budding god. And he will deserve it.

The use of the term firstborn demonstrates how important Yahweh's people are to Him. The firstborn son was always received with the greatest joy. Here was the one who would inherit and maintain the continuance of the family name. Here was the one who would receive the choice portion. He was highly prized. And this was what Israel were to God. But the idea behind the word 'Israel' is fluid. It was not fixed and immutable. Men could refuse to be recognised as Israelites, and God would let them go. Men could prove that they were not Israelites by their behaviour and then God would cut them off. And men could become Israelites by joining permanently the households of those who were, by being circumcised into the covenant (12.48) and by committing themselves to Yahweh.

The significance of the application of this term firstborn is brought out in Deuteronomy. They are the people chosen and loved by Yahweh from their commencement, a holy people and a special treasure which was why He had bound Himself to them by an oath (Deuteronomy 7.6-8).

So in all this central to God's actions is His love for Israel. As the descendants of Jacob they are as a firstborn son to Him. As He cherished Abraham, Isaac and Jacob so will He cherish these His people. He is their father and they are his adopted son, treated as His firstborn and therefore of great importance. This will one day be a strong weapon in the hands of the prophets as they seek to convince Israel and Judah of their sins (Malachi 1.6) and a basis on which the people will plead with God (Isaiah 63.16; 64.8). See also Psalm 68.5. Yet it is not a prominent thought in the prophetic teaching.

This is the second use in Exodus of 'Israel' without the phrase 'children of--' (see 3.16 and contrast 4.29). In both cases it is caused by the requirements of the thought. In the first 'elders of Israel' still has in mind that these men stand in the place of and represent Israel/Jacob as heads of the tribe, here it is used by God as a collective personal name with Jacob as representative of the fathers well in mind for speaking to Pharaoh. (See also on Genesis 34.7; 49.7). It is also the name by which Pharaoh will speak of the children of Israel (5.2). There will be a gradual movement towards using it as a tribal name but it has not yet solidified. It will be a slow and gradual process. However, from now on Pharaoh sees them mainly as 'Israel' (5.1-2; 9.4; 14.5).

The wonders which I have put in your hand.' This refers to his staff which was now the symbol of his authority and power from God, and was the evidence of what God would do through Moses.

'I will make his heart strong.' But why should God give Pharaoh the strength to resist Him?

Instead of love, for Pharaoh there is to be a hardening. The answer lies partly in the way that He has made men, and is partly given in the account that follows. In one sense it was Pharaoh who strengthened his own heart against God. Literally 'his heart was heavy'. But then God would confirm his attitude and, as it were, give him a little help through circumstances so that he kept firm. Indeed it was necessary for Him to do so, so that Pharaoh could learn his lesson. We have here the paradox of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Pharaoh would in fact have been hardhearted in this matter whatever God did. But the writer recognises that all is of God, and therefore if he was hardhearted, then God had done it. (And even then Pharaoh chased after Israel once he had let them go, which was very much the result of his own hardness of heart).

Furthermore there would come a time, foreseen by God, when he had so hardened himself that every attempt to soften him could only result in a further hardening. Then God knew that everything He did would harden Pharaoh's heart even more. So He could say quite truly, 'I will harden his heart.'

As we have seen, in contrast to Yahweh's firstborn is the firstborn of Pharaoh. He was the pride and hope of Egypt. But Pharaoh is warned that because he will not deal rightly with Yahweh's firstborn, his own firstborn will be doomed. What a man sows he will reap.

This thought of the slaying of the firstborn now leads on to an incident in Moses' life that followed these words, where Moses' life was put in danger because his son has not been circumcised. It is not only Pharaoh who was to be judged if he failed to obey God. Here was Moses going to deliver God's firstborn, a sonship evidenced by their having been circumcised. And yet at least one of his own sons was not circumcised. We may even surmise that God had put a strong feeling within him that he should circumcise his sons, but had been strongly resisted in the case of one by his wife.

4.24-26 'And it came about on the way, at the lodging place, that Yahweh met him and sought to cause his death. Then Zipporah took a flint, and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at his feet. And she said, "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me." So he let him alone. Then she said, "A bridegroom of blood because of the circumcision."'

It is clear from this passage that at least one of Moses' sons had not been circumcised. But now that Moses was going among his own people, to whom circumcision was a sign of the covenant, this could not be allowed. It was a sign of disobedience and refusal to respond to the covenant requirements. And it may well have indicated the divided loyalties of his family. And this with Moses of all people, the one who would act in the name of the covenant! Thus God moved in to warn him.

'Her son.' The relative pronoun may signify that she saw the firstborn as especially her son, or it may be that while Moses had insisted on circumcising his firstborn son, his wife had claimed the second to be more peculiarly hers, and had resisted his being circumcised.

'Yahweh met him and sought to cause his death.' (Literally 'to kill him'). Clearly this means that in some way Moses was brought face to face with death, probably through some illness, in a way that made him and his wife conscious of their flagrant disobedience. (Had Yahweh really wanted to kill him he would have been dead). Then Zipporah acted rapidly and circumcised her son, averting the threat of death.

'At the lodging place.' Because he had his family with him it is possible he lodged at some kind of primitive inn, but such would be unlikely here in the wilderness. It may simply mean that they received hospitality in a tent, or in a lean-to left to be used by travellers, or took up residence by a convenient spring.

'Took a flint.' It was the custom that circumcision as an ancient rite had to be performed with a flint knife (compare Joshua 3.5). This was in fact a good custom as a flint knife would be sterilised.

'Of her son.' In verse 20 she had more than one son, but it may be that it was recognised that it was the circumcision of the firstborn that was important at this point. Or perhaps one had already been circumcised as suggested above, and this was the second son whom she looked on as more peculiarly her own.

'Cast it at his feet.' Literally 'made it touch his feet.' Presumably as an offering to Yahweh to avert the tragedy, like the application of the blood of sacrifice, or possibly in annoyance at what was to her a distasteful rite, or because she was having to choose between loyalty to her tribe and loyalty to Moses and to Yahweh. It may have been that, having given way on the first son, she had opposed the circumcision of her second son (or vice versa). Thus one son was part of Yahweh's 'firstborn' while the other paralleled Pharaoh's firstborn.

'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.' Her words are considered important for they are repeated twice. It would appear to be an indirect petition, a pious petition to Yahweh, signifying that the required blood had been spilt. Or it may have been a complaint suggesting that marriage to him had introduced her to this distasteful rite of blood. She may have been saying 'It was not until I married you that I had to put up with this kind of thing.'

Blood was in fact important in all serious relationships. Covenants were sealed in blood. It may thus be that she was angry at being forced into a covenant that she did not want to partake in, and recognised that now the covenant blood was binding on her too.

'Because of the circumcisions.' Circumcision is in the plural. This may simply be a plural of intensity indicating the importance of circumcision, or it may be seen as confirming Zipporah's anger that she had previously had to circumcise one son, and had now had to circumcise the other. It would seem to confirm that both sons had now been circumcised.

A vital lesson arises from this passage to which we must all take heed. It is no good going forward to take our place in the purposes of God if there is failure with our own personal lives. Unless we are prepared to put right our personal lives and cease to have divided loyalties then seeking to serve God can only bring us into judgment. It is an insult to God. We must first make right the situation and then we can come and offer our gift (Matthew 5.23-24).

The Commencement of The Contest Between Yahweh and Pharaoh In Egypt (4.27-7.13).

Moses now meets up with Aaron and they go to Egypt to demand the release of Israel so that they may go into the wilderness and worship Yahweh. Pharaoh refuses their request and responds viciously.

- a On arriving in Egypt Moses and Aaron perform their signs before the elders and begin their task in preparation for approaching Pharaoh (4.27-31).
- b They approach Pharaoh who turns on the people (5.1-23)
- c Yahweh responds to Pharaoh's behaviour with a show of authority and power, providing His credentials, and promising to deliver His People (6.1-9).
- c Yahweh's gives a charge to Moses and Aaron concerning the deliverance and details of Aaron's credentials are provided as the head of Moses' family (6.10-30)
- b After their first rebuff Moses and Aaron are to approach Pharaoh again (7.1-5)
- a They begin their task by performing the miracle of the staff becoming a snake, and their snake eats up the snakes of Egypt (7.6-13)

Note the parallels. In 'a' Moses meets up with Aaron and they go to Egypt to demand the release of Israel so that they may go into the wilderness and worship Yahweh. Pharaoh refuses their request and responds viciously. In the parallel Yahweh by a sign reveals what He will do to Pharaoh if he remains intransigent. He too will act viciously. In 'b' Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh who turns on the people, in the parallel, having been rebuffed they approach Pharaoh again. In 'c' Yahweh responds to Pharaoh's behaviour with a show of authority and power, providing His credentials and promising to deliver His People, and in the parallel He gives a charge to Moses and Aaron to bring about this deliverance and Aaron's credentials are provided as the head of Moses' family.

Moses and Aaron Begin Their Task Of Delivering Israel (4.27-31).

At long last Aaron and Moses meet up, and Aaron is made aware of the huge implications of their meeting. Then they return to Egypt together and commence their campaign for the deliverance of the children of Israel.

This passage may be analysed as follows:

- a Aaron is told to go and meet Moses and meets him at the mountain of God (27).
- b Moses tells Aaron all that Yahweh has said and reveals to him the signs (28).
- c Moses and Aaron gather the elders of Israel (29).
- b Aaron speaks all the words which Yahweh spoke to Moses and does the signs in the sight of the people (30).
- a The people believe when they hear that Yahweh has visited His people and bow their heads and worship (31).

In 'a' Aaron and Moses meet up at the Mountain of God where Yahweh has promised to deliver His people and where they are to worship Him in the future, and in the parallel the people respond to the fact that Yahweh has visited His people, and worship Him where they are. In 'b' Moses tells Aaron all that Yahweh has said and reveals to him the signs, in the parallel Aaron tells the people all that Yahweh has said and does the signs before the people. Central to it all in 'c' is the gathering of the elders of Israel to Moses and Aaron without which there could be no progress.

4.27-28 'And Yahweh said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." And he went and met him in the mountain of God, and he kissed him, and Moses told Aaron all the words of Yahweh with which he had sent him and all the signs with which he had charged him.'

God tells Aaron to go out to meet Moses and they meet at the very place where Moses had met with God and received his theophany. There they have an emotional reunion and Moses outlines all that has taken place and what they are now expected to do.

'The mountain of God.' This is Horeb (see 3.3) where Mount Sinai was sited. It is probable that it was seen locally as a holy mountain.

4.29-31 'And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel, and Aaron told them all the words which Yahweh had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people, and the people believed, and when they heard that Yahweh had visited the children of Israel, and that he had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.'

In a brief summary the writer tells us that Moses and Aaron now carried out God's command with regard to the children of Israel. They gathered the elders together and outlined to them what had happened, and they called the people together, possibly for an act of worship, which

would be permissible. Then Aaron performed the signs before them and the people. This produced response and worship as the people 'believed'. Hope began to fill their hearts and they bowed their heads and worshipped.

'And Aaron --- performed the signs.' He was now the front man acting on behalf of Moses, and he presumably now carried, at least temporarily, 'the staff of God' (4.17, 20). There was wisdom in this. Moses was a stranger whereas Aaron was well known to them and trusted. And he was the mouth and had the eloquence. Moses was, of course, involved. It was presumably his hand that would become leprous. But Aaron was pressing the claim on the people. How quickly the performing of the signs is passed over. The writer is in haste to move on to the main battle. The indication is suggested that the people responded immediately. At this point their hearts were open (in contrast with Pharaoh's). 'The people believed.' Faith was always central to experiencing God's working. Compare Genesis 15.6. It was no doubt here counted to them for righteousness for all who believed.

'That Yahweh had visited the children of Israel.' They had begun to think that He had forgotten them but now they learned that He had been among them and had seen the dreadful conditions under which they lived. But the easy part was now over, Pharaoh would take more convincing.

Note for Christians.

This passage has many things to say to us. In the sign of the snake we see a picture of God's triumph over Satan (compare Genesis 3.15), and of His promise that we can 'take him by the tail', that is render him helpless by the power of God through His word, just as Jesus did during His period of temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4.1-13). He may seem fearsome, and indeed he is, but we can say, 'the Lord rebuke you' (Jude 1.9).

In the same way our hands may be 'unclean' and leprous with the leprosy of sin, but God can purify our hands and make them useful in His service. But only if they are yielded to Him. Many of us need our hands to be cleansed from the leprosy of sin, and to say, 'take my hands and let them be, consecrated Lord to thee'. Only then will they be truly whole.

We may not find ourselves beside the Nile, the river god of Egypt who was opposed to Yahweh. Even many Israelites probably thought of him as powerful and invincible. But Yahweh in portent 'slew' him and turned his waters into blood. In the same way we will have to face in our lives many things which seek to rule over us, and it will be then that we need to look to the One Who could turn the Nile into blood, and render its power inoperative. For we can be sure that He can do the same with regard to what we have to face. We know from this that nothing can withstand His power.

Like some of us, Moses was ready to make excuses in order to avoid obeying God. He was no longer used to parleying with diplomats, and not a ready speaker. But God provided him with 'a mouth', just as He can provide us with all we need when we obey Him and carry out His will. Moses fought hard against God, but in the end he yielded and began one of the most illustrious and powerful careers of all time. God is patient with us. Fortunately He does not give up on us like we give up on Him.

And just as Moses was called on to circumcise his son on pain of death, so are we called on to make sure that we have experienced the greater circumcision, that which is without hands, in the putting off of our flesh and the transforming of our lives by coming in faith to Jesus Christ and experiencing His saving power, through the blood of Christ and by the power of His Spirit (Colossians 2.11). And that we let it carry through into our lives. For it is that which will save us from ourselves, and finally from eternal death. And we need to seek it, not only for ourselves

but others also.

And finally we have in this chapter the first clear statement of the unique Fatherhood of God for those who are His. Israel is 'His son' His firstborn', beloved and cared for and with a glorious future inheritance, in contrast with all others. That is why He persevered with them. And he still perseveres. All who believe in Christ are in the same way incorporated within God's people, become the true Israel, and can look to God as their Father. Equally certainly those who refuse to respond to Him will never know His Fatherhood.

End of note).

The Situation Worsens (5.1-23).

After the wonder of what they had seen probably all the parties involved considered that the future would be plain sailing. For who could resist such wonders? They had overlooked someone who thought of himself as a god and beyond being touched by men and their tribal gods.

The first Confrontation with Pharaoh (5.1-4).

- a Moses and Aaron come to Pharaoh and in the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, request that he let them go to feast to Yahweh in the wilderness (1).
- b Pharaoh contemptuously asks who Yahweh is and says that he does not know Him (2).
- b They reply that He is the God of the Hebrews Who has met with them and called on them to make offerings and sacrifices in the wilderness (3).
- a The king of Egypt's reply is to ask why they are seeking to release the people from their obligatory service and to demand that they return to their burdens (4).

Note the parallel between (a) their desire to hold a religious feast to Yahweh and in the parallel the implication that their true service lies in slaving for the king of Egypt. His anger was probably aroused by the request that all may go. That would seriously hinder the building work being done. Permission might have been given to a few.

5.1 'And afterwards Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.' " ' "

Moses and Aaron now sought the privilege of approaching Pharaoh. There is no suggestion that Moses is seen as a prince or given special privileges. He and Aaron approach as representatives of the children of Israel and would need to go through all the necessary formalities. We know that even lowly slaves were permitted to appeal freely to Pharaoh, at least in the days of the Ramesside dynasty. Pharaoh probably liked to see himself as a father to his subjects.

'Yahweh, the God of Israel.' The children of Israel are now being depicted as a tribal grouping, Israel, and Yahweh is declared to be their God.

'A feast to me in the wilderness.' No doubt more was said than we have here. Pharaoh would be used to the flowery requests put before him by trained orators, and Aaron would no doubt follow the pattern (it was this that Moses had demurred at). But the end request was made that they be permitted to have a pilgrimage to the place where their God had revealed Himself, which would include a period of worship, followed by feasting, in the wilderness to honour the God Who had appeared to Moses in a great theophany in the wilderness.

Later it would also be pointed out that it was necessary to go out of sight of their Egyptian

neighbours because they would be offended at the sacrifices offered by the Israelites at such a great feast (8.26). For some of the animals slaughtered were seen as sacred by many Egyptians, and to see them killed would be to rouse them to extreme violence.

5.2 'And Pharaoh said, "Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh and moreover I will not let Israel go."

That Pharaoh had been willing to see them indicates that their request, which would have been explained to high officials, was considered appropriate to be offered. But he refused to consider it, and replied with contempt.

'Who is Yahweh? --- I do not know Yahweh.' As a god and companion of the gods he indicated that Yahweh was an unknown among the gods. Certainly he did not acknowledge Him, for He was a nonentity. Why then should He listen to Him? His voice would be filled with contempt. He possibly recognised that this Yahweh must be a 'God of the Hebrews', but that was different from acknowledging Him and respecting Him. Then he came down to earth. 'Moreover I will not let Israel go.' His reply was final. It should be recognised that this revealed this Pharaoh as a particularly unyielding person. Many kings would have been willing to acknowledge the gods of their slaves even though they did not themselves worship them. To refute such gods was to display religious arrogance of an unusual kind. This might point to Amenophis IV as the Pharaoh, for he sought to restrict worship to the worship of Aten.

'I do not know Yahweh.' By this he probably meant that he did not acknowledge that He had any rights. As far as he was concerned Yahweh could be ignored.

'Israel'. Pharaoh usually thinks of the children of Israel as just 'Israel' (compare 14.5).

5.3 'And they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Let us go, we pray you, three days journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to Yahweh our God, lest he fall on us with pestilence and the sword."

Courageously they pressed their request further to urge its crucial importance. 'The God of the Hebrews has met with us.' They assured him that there had been a wonderful theophany and that He had made certain demands on them. They dare not refuse, otherwise they may suffer pestilence and physical violence by the sword. Pharaoh might not acknowledge Yahweh but they did, and they were fearful of what He might do. It was widely believed that such afflictions resulted from not honouring gods sufficiently.

They possibly hoped that this would give Pharaoh pause for thought. Pestilence would affect his people as well and 'the sword' could only indicate an invasion. Significantly Goshen was near the Egyptian northern borders, the direction from which invasion would probably come, and from which the Hyksos had previously come. It was thus in everyone's interest that the God of the Hebrews be propitiated.

'The God of the Hebrews.' An attempt to explain more of Whom Yahweh is. Pharaoh might not know who 'Israel' are, but he will know who 'the Hebrews' are. So they explain that Yahweh is their God. To Pharaoh 'the Hebrews' would equate with 'the Habiru', the landless and wild people who had no settled place, who gathered in bands and came out of the wilderness and even attacked cities, who worked in mines and many of whom he had now himself enslaved. The 'prw, as the Egyptians called them, are mentioned in a number of Egyptian texts and range from fighting men in Canaan to captives employed as servants to strain wine, to prisoners given to the temples, to workers in the quarries of the Wadi Hammamat.

'Three days journey.' A stereotyped term. Not a great distance but sufficient to be able to reach 'the wilderness' proper. It could be less than two actual days (an evening, a day and a part morning) They did not want the request to sound too demanding. They would only be gone a short time.

5.4 'And the king of Egypt said to them, "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, loose the people from their works. Get you to your burdens."'

As we have seen constantly, the ancient writer liked to use variety when writing, thus here 'Pharaoh', the father of his people, now becomes the stern 'king of Egypt'. It is not as 'father' of his people that he speaks but as the despotic king. He had now lost patience with them and accused them of simply trying to find an excuse to avoid working, to obtain for the people a holiday. He commanded that they cease such foolishness and get down to the tasks assigned to them. Their loyalty lay in serving him. That was where their true religious service lay.

It should be noted that at this point no signs and wonders had been shown to Pharaoh. The appeal had been made to him on the basis of common justice and seeking the favour that would be expected from a just ruler. Pharaoh had been given his chance to prove himself just and wise.

'Moses and Aaron.' The fact that Moses and Aaron are mentioned together in this way suggests that Moses has approached as a representative of the children of Israel rather than as a prince of Egypt. The latter thought never appears at any stage. It was probably better that Pharaoh did not know who he was.

'The king of Egypt.' This is an indication of what Pharaoh is. In comparison with Yahweh he is only the king of Egypt, an earthly monarch with a limited kingdom.

Pharaoh's Vindictive Response to Their Approach (5.5-19).

- **a Pharaoh says, the people of the land are many and you make them rest from their burdens (5).**
- **b Pharaoh commands officers and taskmaster not to give straw to the people, they must gather straw for themselves (6-7).**
- **c But the tally of bricks produced must not diminish because they are idle in seeking to sacrifice to their God (8).**
- **d Heavier work is to be laid on the people so that they do not listen to lying words (9).**
- **e The officers and taskmasters of Egypt explain that Pharaoh has said, 'Do not give them straw'. (10).**
- **f They are to get straw where they can but their tally must not be diminished (11).**
- **f The people scatter through the land to get stubble for use as straw (where they can), and the taskmasters say, 'fulfil you daily quotas as when there was straw' (13).**
- **e The officers of the children of Israel are beaten and asked why they have not produced their quotas on the same level as before. They complain to Pharaoh that they are not given straw (14-16a).**
- **d They complain to Pharaoh that they are expected to make bricks, and are beaten whereas the fault lies with his people (as a result of being made to work more heavily) (15-16).**
- **c He replies that they are idle which is why they seek to sacrifice to Yahweh (17).**
- **b They are therefore to go and work and no straw is to be given to them, although they must still deliver their quotas (18).**
- **a The officers of the children of Israel recognise their evil situation when they are told that they must fulfil their daily quotas (19).**

Note that in 'a' it is Pharaoh's case that they are seeking a relatively easy time, while in the parallel it is the case of the officers of the children of Israel that their situation is evil. In 'b' Pharaoh commands the Egyptian officers and taskmaster not to give straw to the people, they must gather straw for themselves, while in the parallel they are to go and work and no straw is to be given to them, although they must still deliver their quotas. In 'c' Pharaoh insists that the tally of bricks must be maintained because they are idle, as revealed by their desire to go and offer sacrifices, while in the parallel he replies that they are idle which is why they seek to sacrifice to Yahweh. In 'd' heavier work is to be laid on the people so that they do not listen to lying words, while in the parallel they are beaten because heavier work is laid on them by forcing them to make bricks and collect the straw for themselves, so that the fault lies with the Egyptians. In 'e' the officers and taskmasters of Egypt explain to the children of Israel that Pharaoh has said, 'Do not give them straw', while in the parallel the officers of the children of Israel are beaten and asked why they have not produced their quotas on the same level as before, at which they complain to Pharaoh that they are not given straw. In 'f' they are told that they are to get straw where they can but their tally must not be diminished, while in the parallel the people scatter through the land to get stubble for use as straw where they can, and the taskmasters say, 'fulfil you daily quotas as when there was straw' (they must not be diminished).

5.5 'And Pharaoh said, "Behold, the people of the land are now many, and you make them rest from their burdens." '

'The people of the land.' An interesting term. It is clear that the children of Israel were now seen as permanent residents in Goshen, and possibly constituted the majority. They are said to be 'many'. Had they been but a few permission might have been granted, but such permission here would result in almost total cessation of work on Pharaoh's projects.

Pharaoh's complaint is that Moses and Aaron are making the people rest from their burdens. In other words they are making cultic activity an excuse for not fulfilling their responsibilities.

5.6 'And the same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, and their administrative scribes, saying, "You shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as you have done before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the recorded requirement of bricks which they made previously, you shall require of them. You shall not diminish any of it, for they are idle. That is why they cry, saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our god'."

Pharaoh now demonstrated his view of the situation. Their request was not one made from genuine religious motives, but in order to dodge work. They must therefore be taught a lesson that they would not forget. He would not have had any real knowledge of their struggles to survive or of their hardships. He would simply have judged them by the standards of himself and his palace officials. It was a similar attitude to that of Catherine the Great of Russia, who when told of the shortage of bread in Russia so that the people were starving, said, 'Let them eat cake'. She thought that they were just being picky. She had no idea of the sparse conditions under which they lived and that to them cake was something that was totally unheard of. In the same way this Pharaoh had his eyes closed to the real conditions under which the Israelites lived, and reacted accordingly. This whole attitude would tie in with someone like Amenophis IV whose whole sense of religion was concentrated on one god, and considered all other worship to be sacrilege. (But while he worshipped Aten he did not withdraw the worship of himself. His people worshipped Aten through him). On the other hand it could have been true of any Pharaoh who despised gods other than those of Egypt.

Straw was required to make the bricks, probably to act as a binding agent. This has been confirmed by the examination of Egyptian brickwork. The bricks were made of Nile mud mixed with the straw and were made in frames or moulds and then left to dry in the sun. But

the people were now to be required to gather the straw themselves and yet maintain the level of production. (They do not, as suggested by some commentators, make bricks without straw at any stage). An interesting supporting comment is found in an Egyptian papyrus in which a man, who had to supervise or construct a building, said, "I am not provided with anything. There are no men for making bricks, and there is no straw in the district."

'The taskmasters -- the administrative scribes.' These are the "nogesim" and the "shoteray". Usually these are translated as "taskmasters" and "officers". However, from Egyptian pictures it is possible to determine the functions of these two officials. The first one was actually a driver or a presser, and this corresponds to the Egyptian word for "overseer", the one who supervised the men at work and oppressed them to his heart's content, even flogging them if he so desired. The other word is shoteray, and is derived from the word "shatar", which probably refers to writing and involves scribes. They had complete control over the construction, and of the bondsmen themselves, including their food and other particulars. They also had control over the supply of bricks and absenteeism. Some of the latter, if not all, were in this case Israelite officials appointed by the taskmasters (verse 15).

We must not be deceived by the fact that the people of Israel were slaves. In fact all Egyptians were slaves to Pharaoh as well. He was a god to them and his position had been firmly established in the time of the great famine (Genesis 47.20). Furthermore many foreign slaves would be employed in high places and hold powerful positions. But the majority of the people of Israel were not in that happy position, although some may well have been.

'The recorded requirement of bricks.' This literally involves the measuring of the bricks. The practical Egyptian did not count the bricks, but laid them in rows and measured them to assess the space they would fill in a building. Their facility with numbers was limited.

'For they are idle.' This was the common excuse for making unreasonable demands in order to obtain more work and larger production from slaves. Up to now the labour of the children of Israel had been harsh but bearable. We read elsewhere that they were able to cultivate their own plots of ground (Deuteronomy 11.10); to raise crops of cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic (Numbers 11.5); to catch fish (Numbers 11.5); and to attend public meetings (Exodus 4.30, 31), although much might have been done by the womenfolk.

Now the pressure would come on them which would take them beyond the limit. In Pharaoh's view the reason that they were able to ask for time off was because they were not working full out. He would not take their desire to worship their God seriously. The well-to-do, who would shudder at the thought of doing such work themselves, and who live for enjoyment, have always very easily characterised working people who wanted some enjoyment for themselves as idle.

5.9 "Let heavier work be laid on the men that they may toil in it, and let them not regard lying words."

In future the men were to be made to sweat even more, so that they would become really exhausted, and they were to be warned against accepting their leaders 'lying tales' which he saw as just an excuse to avoid work, and as coming from troublemakers.

5.10-12 'And the taskmasters of the people went out, and their administrative scribes, and they spoke to the people, saying, "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw. Go yourselves, obtain yourselves straw wherever you can find it, for none of your required workload shall be diminished' ." So the people were scattered abroad throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.'

The people were informed of Pharaoh's decision, and they had to start looking for stubble to replace the straw which had previously been provided. All the straw in the fields had obviously been gathered in. Thus it was a matter of searching for stubble and then cutting it up to make it suitable for making bricks. And the extra time spent was not taken into account when deciding production levels

'Throughout all the land of Egypt.' It would seem possible that the decision affected not only the children of Israel but Habiru slaves throughout Egypt. Alternately the phrase might be a deliberate exaggeration to bring out how wide their search had to be and to emphasise the difficulties involved.

5.13 'And the taskmasters pressed them hard saying, "Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw."

The Egyptian taskmasters had no pity, indeed it was their responsibility to ensure that the quotas were fulfilled lest they be punished. So they reacted by greater severity. There was to be no lessening of the number of bricks produced.

5.14 'And the administration scribes of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten severely, and were asked, "Why have you not fulfilled your assignment both yesterday and today in making the same amount of bricks as previously?" '

Thus in the end the buck fell on the middlemen, the Israelite administrative scribes responsible for general management, and they were beaten severely because the quotas were not fulfilled and were asked why they had not fulfilled them in the way that they had previously.

5.15-16 'Then the administrative scribes of the children of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you deal with your servants in this way? There is no straw given to your servants, and they say to us, 'Make brick', and behold your servants are beaten, but the fault is in your own people." '

The managers professed that they could not believe that it was Pharaoh who had given the orders because they were so unreasonable, and they sought to blame the taskmasters, Pharaoh's 'own people'. Instead of 'the fault is in your own people' LXX and Syriac read 'and you will be guilty of a wrong against your own people' but the Massoretic text fits better psychologically. It would not have been wise for them to accuse Pharaoh directly.

5.17-18 'But he said, "You are idle, you are idle, that is why you say 'Let us go and sacrifice to Yahweh.' Go therefore now and toil, for no straw will be given to you, yet you will deliver the expected quantity of bricks." '

Pharaoh's reply was uncompromising. Notice the repetition. It expressed his animosity He stated that it was clear to him that they did not have enough to do or they would not have made the request to go and worship this Yahweh. Therefore they must carry on without being provided with straw and make sure they fulfilled their quota. 'Go -- and toil.' he knew that what was being asked of them was difficult, but considered that they had deserved it.

5.19 'And the administrative scribes of the children of Israel saw that they were in a dreadful position (literally 'an evil') when it was said, "You shall not diminish anything from your bricks, your daily tasks".'

Understandably the administrative scribes, the managers, felt let down. Moses and Aaron had taken on themselves (that was how they now saw it) to approach Pharaoh with their suggestion and now they, the managers, were paying for it. They called on Yahweh to judge, in view of the

consequences, whether Moses and Aaron had been right to do what they did. It was a bitter request and heartfelt.

The Complaint of the Administrative Scribes of the Children of Israel (5.20-6.1).

- a As they leave the presence of Pharaoh the administrative scribes meet Moses and Aaron, and ask that Yahweh will look on Moses and Aaron and judge them for making the children of Israel an abhorrence to Pharaoh and his servants so that they are treating them so badly (20-21).
- b Moses returns to Yahweh and asks Him why He has treated His people so badly and what purpose He had in sending him (22)
- b For, he points out, since he has spoken to Pharaoh in Yahweh's name His people are being even more ill-treated, nor had Yahweh delivered them as He promised (23).
- a Yahweh replies that he will now see what He intends to do to Pharaoh, and He will do it with such a strong hand that (it will be an abhorrence to Pharaoh and) he will let them go, no, will be so affected that he will even drive them out of his land by a strong hand (6.1).

In 'a' The administrative scribes of Israel leave the presence of Pharaoh, in the parallel they will be driven out by him. Their complaint is that they have been made an abhorrence to Pharaoh, and Yahweh's reply is essentially that they will become such an abhorrence to Pharaoh that he will want to get rid of them. In 'b' Moses returns to Yahweh and asks Him why He has treated His people so badly and what purpose He had in sending him, while in the parallel he points out that since he has spoken to Pharaoh in Yahweh's name His people are being even more ill-treated, nor had Yahweh delivered them as He promised.

5.20-21 'And they met Moses and Aaron who stood in the way as they came out from Pharaoh, and they said to them, "Yahweh look on you and judge, for you have made our odour abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us.'

The administrative scribes now charge Moses and Aaron with having made things much worse. They call on Yahweh Himself to pass judgment on them because they have made the name of Israel abhorred in Pharaoh's mind so that they themselves (the scribes) are under the threat of execution.

'They met Moses and Aaron.' Moses and Aaron had been waiting anxiously to find out what response Pharaoh would give to the pleas of the managers.

'To put a sword in their hand to kill us.' Not literally, but figuratively. They would be killed by the strain of impossible demands and the consequent severe punishments. It may, however, be that the overseers had even had to resort to swords because of their resistance, or that there were threats of summary execution.

5.22-23 'And Moses returned to Yahweh and said, "Lord, why have you treated this people so badly? Why is it that you sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has treated this people badly, nor have you delivered your people at all."

Moses was baffled. Why had God sent him if this was to be the result? He had come at Yahweh's command and yet God was seemingly standing by and doing nothing. Indeed in view of the fact that as a consequence the people were being ill treated even more by Pharaoh, that ill treatment could be laid at His door.

(Note for Christians.

What happened to Moses and Israel, will often happen in our lives. When we pray God does not always deliver from trials immediately. He has greater purposes to work than we can ever know. Things may seem to be getting worse day by day, but we can be sure of this, that if we have committed our cause into His hands, our deliverance is sure. But it will be easier for us if instead of fighting Him we trust Him for our future. For then we will both enjoy His presence now and His deliverance when it comes. 'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength' (Isaiah 30.15).

End of note).

6.1 'And Yahweh said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for by a strong hand will he let them go, and by a strong hand will he drive them out of his land."'

Yahweh's reply is, 'you wait and see what I will do'. And He promises that Pharaoh will be made to listen under Yahweh's strong hand, so much so that he himself will drive the people out with a strong hand.

'By a strong hand.' In 3.19 'the mighty hand' refers to Yahweh. Compare also 13.3 'by strength of hand Yahweh brought you out of this place' (see also 13.9, 14, 16). This would suggest that the strong hand which would move Pharaoh must be that of Yahweh, for Yahweh was about to exert His power against him. By it He would reveal that He truly was Yahweh, 'the One Who is there'. So we may paraphrase, 'by means of a strong hand will Yahweh make him let them go and by a strong hand will Yahweh make him drive them out of his land.' Others, however, refer it to Pharaoh's strong hand seeing it as representing the forcefulness with which Pharaoh will make them depart.

Yahweh's Response to Pharaoh's Behaviour and Promise to His People (6.2-9).

This promise is in the usual form of a chiasmus as follows:

- a God speaks to Moses (2a).
- b God says to Moses, 'I am Yahweh.' (2).
- c He declares how He appeared to Abraham Isaac and Jacob but was not made known by them as Yahweh, and declares how He had promised by covenant to give the land of Canaan to them (3-4).
- d He confirms that He has heard their groanings because of their bondage in Egypt and remembered His covenant (5).
- e He declares that 'I am Yahweh' (6a)
- d He promises them that as Yahweh their covenant God He will bring them out from the bondage in Egypt and redeem them with power (thus making known His name (6b).
- c He promises that He will make them a people and will be their God so that they will know that He is Yahweh, and swears that He will bring them into the land and give them it as a heritage because He swore it to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (thus making Himself known as Yahweh, the One Who acts in history) (8a).
- b He finishes by declaring, 'I am Yahweh'. (8b)
- a The people do not listen to Moses for anguish of spirit (9).

Thus the whole emphasis of this passage is that He is Yahweh, and that He will make the fact known by His powerful activity, in delivering them from bondage in Egypt and giving them the land promised to their fathers. In 'a' God speaks to Moses and in the parallel the people will not listen to him. In 'b' He stresses the fact that 'I am Yahweh', centres on it in 'd' and finishes with it in the parallel 'b'. He declares in 'c' His relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and how He covenanted to give them the land, although by not doing so at that time was not made known to them as Yahweh, the One Who acts, and in the parallel 'c' confirms that He

will now give that land because they are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, thus making Himself known to them as Yahweh, their God Who acts. In 'd' and 'd' is the fact that He knows of their bondage in Egypt and will deliver them from it. They must not think that He has overlooked their condition. And central to all in 'e' is that He is Yahweh.

6.2 'And God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am Yahweh. And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not made known to them, and I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings in which they sojourned."'

This continues the thought of verse 1 and must be interpreted in that light and in the light of verse 7. God tells Moses that He had appeared to their fathers as El Shaddai, the Almighty God, the God of the nations (see note below), the rather remote covenant maker. They had thus been made aware of His universality and greatness, and it was on that basis that He had been able to make the wide promises of blessing for all Abraham's descendants, including those descended from Ishmael. This had been their life experience of God. But they had not experienced His individual, direct, activity on behalf of His chosen line establishing them as rulers over the land. They had not experienced the dynamic of His might and power as their covenant God bringing about the final fulfilment of His promises of possessing the land and being saved from all who hated them. That awaited the future.

So while they had worshipped Yahweh, they had not 'known His name', that is, experienced Him in powerful action bringing about His promises as their covenant God. This was not to deny that Yahweh had been a name passed down from their ancestors under which they had worshipped Him, but it was to point out that they had not in their own time realised or experienced the full significance of that name as 'the One Who acts'. El Shaddai had been the title that throbbed with significance, the God of the nations, the God Who held the future in His hands. Now all that was to be changed. Yahweh was about to make the very depths of His name known, the name that spoke of a powerful presence and activity, Who would be what He wanted to be as He had defined it in chapter 3.

This use of 'known' to signify 'known by His power and activity' is constantly made clear in the context here in Exodus (see 6.7; 7.5, 17; 8.22; 9.29; 10.2 (where knowing Him they will come to know Him for what He is); 14.4, 18) which confirms that that is how we are to view it.

So the promise was that Moses and the people were not like the patriarchs to be given future hopes, they were now to be made aware in the fullest sense of the power contained within the name of Yahweh. They would 'know by experience' that He was Yahweh, 'the One Who is there', for He will reveal His power in the actual deliverance of His people 'with a strong arm'. They were to see Him in action. They would not now just 'know (be aware of) His name' as something that was passed down, they would know it in the depths of their experience because of His powerful activity. It will be made known by what He does. The knowing of His name in this way is a constant theme of the first part of Exodus (3.13-16; 5.2; 6.3, 7; 7.5, 17; 8.10; 9.14; 10.2; 14.4, 18; 16.11). The wonders were wrought so that his people in the future might 'know that I am Yahweh' (10.2; 16.11). He was manifesting Himself in the fullness of His power.

Note on Knowing Yahweh.

Some scholars have taken this verse at its surface value without regard to context and interpreted it as meaning that the name of Yahweh was not even theoretically known to the patriarchs. It suited their theories but it was to miss its whole point.

For what to 'know His name' meant is made especially clear in Judges 2.10. There the people of Israel who had not witnessed His mighty working in their own time were described as those

who 'did not know Yahweh, nor yet the work which He had wrought in Israel'. Now that they knew of Him, of course, in the ordinary sense, and worshipped Him, can hardly be denied. They were aware of their past history and that their fathers had 'known' Him. But as they had not in their own time experienced Yahweh as the mighty Deliverer Whose delivery they had experienced for themselves and were neglecting Him they were said not to 'know Him'. He had become a theory Who could conveniently be ignored. And they had not themselves 'known Him' simply because they had not needed to be directly involved in His saving activity (in the same way as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had not) That was why they could not be said to 'know Yahweh'.

Many are in a similar position today. If you asked them, 'do you know of Jesus Christ?' they would reply, 'Yes, of course'. But if they were asked, 'do you know Him? Have you experienced His saving power?' they would not know what you were talking about. They do not know Him. He has not made Himself known to them. They simply know about Him.

We can compare here the similar expression in regard to Egypt in 7.5. There the Egyptians would know that He is Yahweh because they would have seen His wonders and His mighty judgments. So here in chapter 6 Yahweh will be fully known for the same reason (compare also 14.4). They will have experienced His mighty power.

The point being made is thus that while Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did know the name of Yahweh theoretically and were aware of it, they did not know that name in its practical outworking. They waited in hope. They had never experienced its explosiveness in action. He had not made Himself known as 'the One Who acts'. Rather had they walked before Him in obedience and expectancy of the future, believing that He would make His name known in the future by one day fulfilling His promises.

Yahweh had appeared to them under a number of titles, but especially under the title of El Shaddai, the God of many nations, the One over all, (and had appeared to them also as Yahweh and other titles as well). This was because it was as the God of their future and the God of many nations that He had made His appearance. But His promises as Yahweh the covenant God Who would establish their sovereign position in the world were ever in the future and not then fulfilled. He did not then act to bring them about. They believed in His name but they did not come to know its mighty working to its fullest extent. The dynamite in 'the name' of Yahweh yet remained hidden. But now Israel were to know exactly that. The 'name' was about to burst forth.

However, having said that, we should note that He is not even said to have been 'known' to the patriarchs under the title of El Shaddai. He does not say that they 'knew' Him even under that title. It is simply said that He appeared to them under that title. So while it is said that they were aware of Him as El Shaddai, for He appeared to them as such, *it could not be said even of that title that they 'knew' Him*, for they did not experience His active power with regard to many nations. Always what was promised was in the future. Promises were given to them, and accepted by them, that they would be fathers of many nations and of their future reception of the land, but the actual possession of the land had awaited this day. Then Yahweh/El Shaddai had acted only in promise. But now the situation has changed. God will act in power and 'His name' will be 'made known', and He will be made known as Yahweh in the reality of practical experience as well as in theory.

Thus while to the patriarchs Yahweh had revealed Himself as God Almighty, remote and biding His time, working out His purposes, (and was also known to them by the name of Yahweh), now He is to be 'known' predominantly as Yahweh, the God Who is there to act and has acted, the 'I am' (3.14), the One with special concern for Israel. That will now be the name under which He prominently manifests Himself. At this time in history they need a present

dynamic God, not a more vague universal One. Then they knew *of* Him now they will know Him in reality as they experience His expressed power.

The patriarchs did, of course, know the name of Yahweh as a name. That is not in question. The point is that He was not 'made known' to them in the significance of that name. In the same way they knew of Him by His titles but did not experience His present power in giving them the land. For we must recognise that to the ancient, to know a name was to enter into the power of that name, to experience the personality and force behind it, and to know the fulfilment of it, and they had only known it in promise not in realisation. They could not truly 'know Yahweh' until His promises were fulfilled.

The Title El Shaddai.

The full meaning of 'El Shaddai' is not yet apparent to us but the LXX translates it as 'the Almighty'. It was not, however, the most common title for Yahweh. Yahweh in fact especially *revealed Himself* under this title twice, the first time to Abraham in connection with the greater covenant which included Ishmael in Genesis 17 and the second time to Jacob in Genesis 35.11, and in both cases there was stress on a change of name for the recipient, for to receive a covenant from El Shaddai meant a whole new direction in life. It meant to be taken up into His purposes. So under that title Abraham received from Yahweh the greater covenant which included Ishmael and his descendants, and under it Jacob was confirmed as the inheritor of that greater covenant. Indeed, whenever God is mentioned under the title of El Shaddai it is in relation to 'many nations', not just to the family tribe.

To Abraham in chapter 17 it was said 'you shall be the father of a multitude of nations (hamon goyim)', and Ishmael was a part of that covenant; to Isaac as he blessed Jacob in Genesis 28.3 it was said 'that you may be a company of peoples' (liqhal 'amim); and again to Jacob in Genesis 48.4 reference was made to 'a company of peoples' (liqhal 'amim). It is in recognition of this fact that Jacob speaks of El Shaddai when he sends his sons back to Egypt to obtain the release of Simeon and entrusts them with Benjamin (Genesis 43.14), for it is Yahweh as El Shaddai, the sovereign God over the whole world, who has power to influence the great governor of Egypt that he has in mind. This may also be why Isaac also used this title of Yahweh when he sent his son into a foreign land.

So El Shaddai was very much the title that related to God's worldwide power and purposes. This did, of course, include the local promises as an essential part of that future, but always in the wider context, for it went wider than that. Thus because He was El Shaddai they would bear both a nation and a company of nations. It was true that their direct descendants would be kings and their seed would inherit the promised land, but the promise extended wider to the nations that would descend from Ishmael, and to a multitude and company of nations from other sons, and to many kings of those nations.

Yahweh thus appeared to them twice as El Shaddai (Genesis 17.1; 35.11), and so revealed something of what He was, but it did not fully make Him 'known', for that could only happen when He fulfilled the promises and brought them into actual being. Even El Shaddai was not made known to them by His acts. They knew His titles, they experienced His presence, but they did not experience the outworking of His name. Now they would actually see Him at work.

Thus when the patriarchs had been made aware of the width of what God was offering them in the wider covenant, He appeared to them as El Shaddai, but they had not experienced the depth of His delivering power in the narrower covenant, so He had not been 'made known' to them as Yahweh.

End of note.

'And I also established my covenant with them to give them the land --- in which they sojourned.' That is the point here. The covenant was given to them and established with them but it was not actualised. They only 'sojourned' (lived as aliens) in the land as 'strangers'. But now it was to be given to them in the persons of their descendants, something that they themselves had not experienced. Then they had been aware of Him by His titles, now they would know Him fully in the outworking of His power as revealed in His mighty name.

Here in Exodus then it is the personal part of the covenant that is in mind, that part which relates to Abraham's descent through Isaac, and Isaac's descent through Jacob, the promises limited to the chosen line, the promises in fact connected in Genesis specifically with the name of Yahweh (Genesis 12.1-3; 13.14-17; 15.4-5 with 13-14; 22.16-18; 26.2-4; 28.13-14). And these are now to be brought into effect as Yahweh 'makes Himself known'.

The fact is that the promise of deliverance from Egypt was already specifically connected directly with the name of Yahweh (Genesis 15.13-16). And now Yahweh will make Himself known as what He is in that deliverance. Now they will *know* His name as 'the One Who is there to act', and watch Him in decisive action. As Moses was told earlier, He has 'come down' for that very purpose (3.8), to make known His name.

6.5 "And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant."

Note the progression, "I have established my covenant (verse 4) ---- I have remembered my covenant.' The covenant was established with the fathers, it is remembered, so as to be brought into effect, in connection with the children of Israel. Once again, what was promised is now to be actualised. His name is to be 'known' as He reveals Himself in action.

'I have heard their groaning --- I have remembered my covenant.' Yahweh recognises that Moses' faith is wavering and so He repeats His assurances about what He intends to do. In 2.24 we read that God 'heard their groaning' and 'remembered His covenant'. Now God says that here in those exact words. In 3.7 He had heard their cry as a result of their taskmasters and in 3.8 had come down to deliver them, and now He confirms He will do the same. So while things might seem not to be encouraging, let Moses be sure of this, patience is required but God's purpose and intention has not changed. Patience with God in His work is one thing that all of us find hard to learn.

6.6-8 'For this reason say to the children of Israel, "I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will free you from your bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments, and I will take you to me for a people and you will know that I am Yahweh your God, who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will bring you in to the land concerning which I lifted up my hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and I will give it to you for a heritage. I am Yahweh."'

How then were they to know that He was Yahweh? This was an advance on what had been promised before. The first promise was to deliver out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey (3.8, 17). This promise went much further. They are to receive it for a heritage. He wants them to be comforted and to recognise that nothing that has happened has altered His intentions. The promises still apply and are indeed extended.

The theme of knowing Yahweh continues. He is now about to reveal Himself in their deliverance from their slavery (the Exodus), the taking of them to be His people (Mount Sinai), the bringing of them into the land (Joshua), and the giving it to them for a heritage (Joshua to

David). Thus will they know Him by His name as the One Who is there to act, and has acted, and will worship Him in His Dwellingplace (tabernacle) as the One Who has come down to them to be among them (although still ever being in the heavens).

Note that His words begin and end with the same refrain, 'I am Yahweh.' He is emphasising that they have known His name for so long but have not ever known Him in the real significance of that name. Now they are about to do so.

'I will redeem you with a stretched out arm and with great judgments.' This is only the second use of the term 'redeem', which means to deliver by the payment of a price. The first was when Jacob spoke of 'the Angel who redeemed me from all evil' (Genesis 48.16). Now Yahweh will redeem with a powerful arm and with great judgments.

Redemption always results in deliverance through the payment of a price. It always has a cost. In Jacob's case the price was the strain of wrestling and the expenditure of the strength of Yahweh (which is stressed) which resulted in Jacob's reception of a new name to indicate the new Jacob (Genesis 32.24-28), here it is the expenditure of power through the exercise of God's arm and the pouring out of His wonders as judgments. Redemption is never without cost to the Redeemer. Compare for this 13.13-15 which connects redemption with the deliverance.

'With a stretched out arm and with great judgments.' A stretched out arm is an arm active in power. The great judgments will follow. They are judgments because by their actions the Egyptians have made themselves worthy of judgment.

'Concerning which I have lifted up my hand.' Lifting up the hand was way of making a solemn confirmation of His determination to fulfil His part in the covenant. For this method of solemnly confirming a covenant compare Genesis 14.22; Deuteronomy 32.40. God was sworn to act on their behalf.

6.9 'And Moses spoke so to the children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses for anguish (literally 'shortness') of spirit and because of their cruel bondage.'

They had listened before. But then life had been bearable. Now it was so hard that they were not prepared to listen any longer. They had lost all spirit. They gritted their teeth and closed their ears. They had lost hope. Life was almost unsustainable. From now on Moses and Aaron would have to act alone. But this simply brings out the lesson that when things seem at their worst, God is at His best.

Yahweh's Charge to Moses and Aaron and Details of Aaron's Background (6.10-30).

Here we have a further chiasmus based around genealogical information to do with Aaron as the head of Moses' family demonstrating their credentials. Yahweh has just previously made known His own credentials, now Aaron's credentials are to be laid out. Such a background confirms his worthiness for the task that lies ahead.

- a Yahweh commands Moses to speak to Pharaoh to let the children of Israel leave and Moses says that Pharaoh will not listen to him because he is of uncircumcised lips (10-12).
- b Yahweh gives Moses and Aaron a charge to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (13).
- c Genealogical information concerning the ancestors of Aaron (14-15).
- d The years of the life of Levi were 137 years (16).
- e The years of the life of Kohath were 133 years (17-18).
- d The years of the life of Amram were 137 years (19).

- **c** Genealogical information concerning the family of Aaron (20-25).
- **b** These are that Aaron and Moses to whom Yahweh said, 'Bring the children of Israel out of Egypt'. These are those who spoke to Pharaoh in order to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (26-27).
- **a** In response to Yahweh commanding him to speak to Pharaoh Moses says that he is of uncircumcised lips and that Pharaoh will therefore not hear him (28-30).

Note in 'a' the emphasis on Moses' 'uncircumcised lips' in both cases. In 'b' the charge is given to Moses and Aaron to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, and in the parallel Aaron and Moses (note the reversal because it is in the context of Aaron being the head of the family) are twice said to have to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. In 'c' genealogical information about Aaron is given in both cases. In 'd' both achieve the age of 137 years.

We must now consider it in more detail.

6.10-12 'And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, "Go in. Speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of this land." And Moses spoke before Yahweh saying, "Look, the children of Israel have not listened to me, how then will Pharaoh listen to me who am of uncircumcised lips?"'

Having sought to bolster Moses' faith with a reminder and revelation of Who He is, God now commanded that Moses go again to Pharaoh to request leave to go out of the land. But Moses' reply was, if the children of Israel who believe in Yahweh will not listen, why should Pharaoh? He remembers vividly the scathing words of Pharaoh, 'I do not know Yahweh'.

Yahweh tells him what he was to say, 'Let the children of Israel go out of this land.' The purpose of the 'going' is not mentioned here, but at this stage the idea is still that they go for the purpose of worshipping and serving Yahweh in the wilderness (compare 7.16; 8.1). That is how Pharaoh also continued to see it (8.8). But it would be the first reminder that as a people they did not belong in this land.

'Who am of uncircumcised lips.' The idea of 'uncircumcised' is of unresponsiveness, of a function which is not working properly. It does not suggest that Moses was uncircumcised. Compare Jeremiah 6.10; Leviticus 26.41. It means rather that he had a 'covering' on his lips which he could not remove (as with the foreskin). It is saying that his words are not powerful enough to be effective, or that his lips have not been sufficiently trained. He is not properly qualified. The thought may also include that Pharaoh will not see him as a man dedicated to a god, but as one whose lips are unsanctified.

The Genealogies of Moses and Aaron Are Outlined (6.13-27)

The writer saw it as important that now in preparation for the deliverance the credentials of Aaron, and therefore of Moses, should be given.

6.13 'And Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron and gave them a charge to the children of Israel, and to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the children of Egypt out of the land of Egypt.'

This is one of the summary verses which occur so often in the Scriptures, summarising what was to come. That Yahweh was working to finally bring the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land was unquestioned, and had been clearly stated. That thought may be included here as a note of final intent. But we can equally argue that this must be read in the light of the context. The purpose stated is continually that they be allowed to go and serve Yahweh in the wilderness, and that can be read in here.

The charge having been given it is now considered necessary to outline the genealogical background to these two great men. In those days a man's genealogy and family connections were seen as of prime importance and were often found at the beginning of a written record. Furthermore the preliminaries being over the main battle was about to begin. It was thus important to identify the background of the main participants who were not yet identified, and it was done in a wider context. Moses and Aaron's place in the scheme of things had to be pinpointed.

6.14-15 'These are the heads of their fathers' houses. The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. These are the families of Reuben. And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel and Jamin, and Ohad and Jachin, and Zohar and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the families of Simeon.'

These genealogies of Reuben and Simeon are introductory to the genealogy of Levi. Reuben is mentioned as the firstborn of Israel, and Simeon probably because he is Levi's twin (see on Genesis 49.5). These both add their status to that of Levi. (All these details may well have been included in the submissions for a hearing before Pharaoh). Note the mention of the Canaanite woman. This was looked on as a blot against Simeon's name. Marriage with Canaanite women was frowned on. The Simeonites would later bring a similar blot on themselves in Numbers 25.

So Reuben and his sons are mentioned because he was the head of the whole of Israel, the 'firstborn'. Then Simeon is mentioned because he was Levi's twin, and therefore closely associated. These make clear who Levi himself was.

'Their fathers' houses.' This refers to the family clans. These became leaders of the clans.

6.16-19 'And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon and Kohath and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were a hundred and thirty seven years. The sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei, according to their families. And the sons of Kohath: Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were a hundred and thirty three years. And the sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their generations.'

Note that the part of the family of especial concern are highlighted by a statement of the length of their lives. Their long lives were an indication of Yahweh's blessing on that part of the family. A number ending in seven indicated divine connection. A number ending in three indicated completeness. We note that Levi's lifespan is given as being the same as Amram's, both ending in seven. Then are outlined their wider family connections, the brothers of Kohath and their sons, and the brothers of Amram and their sons (verses 21-22). Note that the term 'the sons of Levi' is the equivalent of 'the Levites' (verse 16 with 19).

6.20 'And Amram took for himself Yochebed, his father's sister, as his wife, and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were a hundred and thirty seven years.'

The fact that Amram married his father's sister, later forbidden (Leviticus 18.12), might demonstrate that Amram preceded Moses by some considerable time. The name 'Yochebed' probably means 'Yahweh is glory'. This serves to demonstrate how early the name of Yahweh was incorporated in Hebrew names and confirms that the name of Yahweh was known to the children of Israel well before the time of Moses.

'She bore him Aaron and Moses'. We are probably to see in this the ancient custom whereby descendants could be described as born to their ancestors. Amram is the grandson of Levi and by this time had become a largish clan (Numbers 3.27). Yochebed was possibly the direct daughter of Levi (Numbers 26.59). Aaron is mentioned first as the firstborn.

Alternately there may have been two Amrams, the one descended from the other, and the jump from one to the other being assumed, because he had been in his ancestor's loins. We find a similar case in the genealogy of Ezra in Ezra 7.3, which passes over from Azariah the son of Meraioth to Azariah the son of Johanan, and omits five links between the two, as we may see from 1 Chronicles 6.7-11. This may well have been a regular practise. The first Amram could not be Moses' father because by the time of Moses he would, by a conservative estimate, have had over a thousand male descendants (Numbers 3.28). But if such a jump did occur and there were two Amrams, and Yochebed was Moses' mother, then the marrying of Amram by his sister would come very close in time to its prohibition by Moses.

(The lengths of life are interesting. These surely again indicate the ancient use of numbers. The basic building block is one hundred and thirty, indicating long life (one hundred) brought to completeness (thirty). As the first patriarch Levi then has seven added on, the number of divine perfection. Kohath has three added on indicating his completeness compared with his brothers, but inferior to Kohath. Amram, however, as the 'father' of Aaron and Moses has seven added on, returning to the sphere of divine perfection as the house of Moses and Aaron. We can compare how in Genesis apart from the almost universally rounded numbers of nought and five, seven was the next most common number, and was linked with Lamech, Sarah, Ishmael and Jacob. With Lamech in order to make the ultra-perfect 777, Sarah possibly because she was a woman, although the bearer of the promised seed, and Ishmael and Jacob possibly because they died outside the land, or possibly because they were the fathers of nations in accordance with the covenants.

6.21-22 'And the sons of Izhar: Korah and Nepheg and Zichri. And the sons of Uzziel: Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri.

These are 'the sons of' (descendants of) Amram's brothers. Probably Hebron had no children. He may have died young. Overall they represent the leaders of the clans (verse 25).

6.23 'And Aaron took for himself Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon for his wife, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

The family of Aaron is now given. Nahshon, the brother of Aaron's wife, was the son of Amminadab and an important leader of the tribe of Judah (Numbers 1.7), thus Elisheba his sister came from a leading family. We have already been given details of Moses' wife and firstborn son (2.21-22) which satisfactorily explains their absence here. This omission demonstrates the unity of the whole narrative. They had been mentioned elsewhere in the narrative.

6.24 'And the sons of Korah: Assir, and Elkanah and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites.'

These details are given, (exceptionally), probably because Korah himself was 'swallowed up by the earth' or slain by fire from heaven and therefore his sons carried on the line (Numbers 26.10-11). His name was blotted out of Israel.

6.25 'And Eleazar, Aaron's son, took for himself one of the daughters of Putiel for a wife, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.'

Phinehas was a popular Egyptian name. He later proved his loyalty to Yahweh in a rather grim fashion when he slew an Israelite who was brazenly consorting with a pagan Midianite woman (probably in the course of adulterous rites) after many in Israel had taken to the worship of pagan gods (Numbers 25.11). Putiel is also probably an Egyptian name. Phinehas

later became 'the Priest' (the leading priest) after Eleazar.

6.26-27 'These are that Aaron and Moses to whom Yahweh said, "Bring the children of Israel out from the land of Egypt according to their hosts." These are they who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. These are that Moses and Aaron.'

The writer now connects Moses and Aaron as the deliverers from Egypt with the Aaron and Moses mentioned in the genealogy. Notice the switch from 'Aaron and Moses' (verse 26) to 'Moses and Aaron' (verse 27). In the genealogy Aaron is the eldest son, but in importance Moses is primary. These phrases may indicate a reference back to a previous tablet or scroll. There is no real reason why Moses should not be thought of as referring to himself in the third person. It was often done. But it is possible that this is the record of a transcriber.

The description of Aaron and Moses (in verse 13 Moses and Aaron) as intended to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt parallels verse 13.

Yahweh Outlines the Next Phase In the Plan (6.28-30).

6.28-30 'And it happened on the day when Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, that Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, "I am Yahweh. You, speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I say to you." And Moses said before Yahweh, "Look, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how will Pharaoh listen to me?"'

This final statement parallels verses 11-12. Having intervened with a genealogy the writer has to bring his hearers back to where they were before the diversion, thus we have a partial repetition in reverse order of what was written in verses 10-13.

Indeed the constant partial repetitions are intended to build up the hearers anticipation. It was important that the facts were firmly rooted in the mind, and it builds them up to a state of anticipation. It was drawing out the drama. (We, who read from easy to read books, often do not appreciate the difficulties of the ancient writer who knew he was writing for those who would not get a chance to look back over the pages).

"I am Yahweh." Moses of course knew that He was Yahweh, but what God wanted to impress on him more and more was that He was there as 'the One Who is about to act'. He wanted them to *know that He was Yahweh*, that is, to recognise the power with which He would act. He then stressed that Moses must pass on His words to Pharaoh (compare verse 11).

'I am of uncircumcised lips.' See on verse 12. Moses was still full of doubt because of his lack of oratory. He did not feel adequate to present the message before Pharaoh and his court.

Note for Christians.

In this chapter we have seen that through the experiences which Israel were enduring God revealed Himself to them in a new way. Often the purpose for our experiences is that we might come to know God better. There are so many distractions that take possession of our lives. And God has sometimes to put us in positions where we turn our eyes from our distractions and fix our thoughts on Him. And it is then that He will make Himself known to us as He never has before. Then, depending on our response, will be the blessing that we receive from it.

Here we have the genealogy of Aaron. What meaning has that for us today? The truth is that the detailing of a genealogy is a reminder that God knows exactly who we are, even if we do not know ourselves. It is a reminder that God knew all about Aaron, and that He knows all about us. Thus will He direct our lives in the way that is best for us, if only we will let Him.

End of note).

Yahweh Encourages Moses To Go Forward (7.1-13).

- a Yahweh tells Moses that He has made him as a God to Pharaoh, with Aaron as his prophet (1).
- b Moses is therefore to say all that Yahweh commands, and Aaron must communicate it in diplomatic style to Pharaoh, with the aim of him letting the children of Israel leave the land (2).
- c Yahweh promises that He will harden Pharaoh's heart (make it firm and strong in the wrong direction) and will as a result multiply signs and wonders in Egypt The result is that Pharaoh will not listen to them. Yahweh will then lay His hand on Egypt and bring forth His 'hosts', that is His people the children of Israel, and He will do it by great judgments (3-4).
- c Then the Egyptians will know that He is Yahweh, when He stretches out His hand on Egypt, and bring the children of Israel out from among the Egyptians (5).
- b And Moses and Aaron did what Yahweh commanded. That is what they did (6).
- a And Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh (7).

Note that in 'a' Yahweh tells them that He has made him as a God to Pharaoh, with Aaron as his prophet, while in the parallel their ages are given. This suggests that we are to see a significance in their ages. This may lie in the fact that eight intensified is the indication of a new beginning and thus Moses is to be seen as the Deliverer while Aaron is eight intensified plus three, the one who makes the deliverer complete. See the commentary in respect of this. In 'b' Moses is to say all that Yahweh commands, and Aaron must communicate it in diplomatic style to Pharaoh, with the aim of him letting the children of Israel leave the land, and in the parallel they do what they are commanded. In 'c' Yahweh promises that He will harden Pharaoh's heart and will as a result multiply signs and wonders in Egypt (make known that He is Yahweh). The result is that Pharaoh will not listen to them. Yahweh will then lay His hand on Egypt and bring forth His 'hosts', that is His people the children of Israel, and He will do it by great judgments

7.1 'And Yahweh said to Moses, "Look, I have made you a god to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You will speak all that I command you and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh that he let the children of Israel go out of his land."'

In 4.16 Yahweh had said that Moses would be 'as a god' to Aaron, and Aaron would be his 'mouth'. Now he is to 'be a god' to Pharaoh with Aaron as his prophet. The idea would seem therefore to be that he will stand aloof and Aaron will speak on his behalf and perform wonders (4.17). Moses would not only stand as God's representative but would have the mystique that goes with divinity, and be seen as a god and to be at war with the gods of Egypt, and especially the god Pharaoh. He would be the voice, but Aaron would be the mouth.

Elohim is used here, not in the Hebrew sense of God, but as a faithful rendering of the Egyptian title, neter, "god", which was one of the attributes of Pharaoh. It applied to the living as well as to the dead Pharaoh. Thus he could be called "the glorious god" or "the god without equal". In many cases the Pharaohs were also described as "the good god" (neter nefer), or "the great god" (neter ar). In our passage, the use of Elohim is thus putting Moses on a parallel position to Pharaoh, suggesting with the word an ironical reference to Pharaoh's pretensions.

We probably do not appreciate how powerful Pharaoh felt in being divine but now when he saw Moses he would see someone whom he would soon regard as his equal. Moses was to be the 'Pharaoh' of the children of Israel, and Aaron would, in his turn, be his prophet, his "mouth".

These names given to Moses and Aaron were a guarantee of the signs and wonders that were about to be revealed. These alone could have made Pharaoh see Moses as a God.

7.3-5 “And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring forth my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments. And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.”

The plan is now laid bare. God will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he refuses to let the children of Israel go into the wilderness to worship their God, and this will result in the pouring out of God’s mighty judgments in signs and wonders until at last they will be able to go altogether and Egypt will be left glad to see them go and knowing that Yahweh is indeed ‘the One Who is there to act’, greater than all the gods of Egypt. By it the Egyptians will know that He is ‘Yahweh’.

It should, however be noted that the gods of Egypt are only mentioned once in the whole Exodus account (12.12). From his own point of view Moses was dealing with the living Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt were nothing. He did not see himself as battling with gods in which he did not believe. It was Pharaoh, basking in his own divinity, who would see him as a god.

‘My signs and my wonders.’ An indication that what was to come would be so outstanding and unique that they would be beyond the expectation of everyone. ‘Signs’, that is something that demonstrates Who and What He is. ‘Wonders’, that is something to fill men with awe.

‘Bring forth my hosts.’ The word ‘hosts’ is used of armies (Genesis 21.22 and often), of ‘the host of heaven’ meaning the sun, moon and stars (Deuteronomy 4.19; Nehemiah 9.6; Psalm 33.6; 148.2; Isaiah 34.4; 45.12; Jeremiah 33.22), of the panoply of gods represented by them (Deuteronomy 4.19; 2 Kings 21.3, 5; Jeremiah 8.2; Daniel 8.10; Zephaniah 1.5), and of the heavenly hosts of God’s armies (Genesis 32.2) so that God can later be known as ‘Yahweh of hosts’ (first found in 1 Samuel 1.3), and of all things in creation (Genesis 2.1). The thought here may be that they are being brought forth as His hosts, as His army to bring His judgment on Canaan. But it may just represent them as His numerous people whom he would mobilise (‘number’) for the advance on Canaan (see 12.37; Numbers 1-2; 26.1-51).

‘And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.’ Knowing that He is Yahweh involves seeing Him in action. His successful actions will reveal what He is and the meaning of His name.

The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart was so that he would not compromise and thus so ameliorate the position that Israel would have no reason for leaving. But Yahweh was not here intending to harden the heart of a compassionate man. He was ensuring that a cruel, arrogant and evil despot did not for the sake of expediency compromise. What was at stake here was the whole future of Israel.

It must be remembered that humanly speaking Pharaoh had Israel under a slave contract. This would put them in the wrong if they simply disappeared. Yahweh would not encourage the breaking of treaties. Thus it was important that Pharaoh by his own choice insisted that they leave. Of course, once he sent his army after them having first made an agreement with them which he was then intending to break, he had put himself in the wrong and himself broken the contract. Thus Israel was no longer bound by it.

7.6 ‘And Moses and Aaron did so. As Yahweh commanded them so they did.’

This is to let us know immediately that Moses and Aaron did do what Yahweh commanded. They were obedient. We have seen similar brief comments previously. They were typical of Israel's ancient writings. Part of what is in mind here is found in verse 2.

7.7 'And Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh.'

'Eighty years old.' It could be that we are to see in this not a literal number but 'two generations', with forty years representing a generation. The first being seen as ended when he fled from Egypt as 'grown up' (2.11), the second covered his life in Midian and has brought him to this stage. The third stage, that of old age will take him up to his death (Deuteronomy 31.2; 34.7), The 'eighty three' of Aaron would then simply be this 'eighty' with the three years of completeness representing that he was a little older than Moses.

But the parallel with verse 1 suggests that these descriptions in some way tied up with the fact that Moses had been made a God to Pharaoh and Aaron his prophet. Eight is the number of deliverance. There were eight people who were delivered in the ark (Genesis 7.7 compare 1 Peter 3.20). Circumcision which brought men into the covenant with Abraham and delivered them from the world into the covenant community was carried out on the eighth day (Genesis 17.12; Philippians 3.5). It was the eighth day of the feast of Tabernacles, the day that signalled the end of the agricultural year, on which deliverance was proclaimed (later citing Isaiah 12.3). It was on the eighth day that God would accept His people when the new altar of Ezekiel was built, following seven days of atonement, when the new deliverance began (Ezekiel 43.27). It was on the eighth day that Aaron and his sons began their priestly ministry of deliverance and atonement (Leviticus 9.1). The cleansing and deliverance of the one time skin diseased man was accomplished on the eighth day (Leviticus 14.10, 23). It is probable that the eight hundred years of the early patriarchs (Genesis 5.4-19 - each conjoined there with another significant number), indicated their long triumph over death (although it came in the end). Here then the eighty years was probably intended to indicate that these two were God's appointed deliverers.

Moses and Aaron Perform Their First Wonder in Pharaoh's Presence (7.8-13).

- **a Yahweh tells Moses and Aaron that when Pharaoh asks them to prove themselves by a wonder they are to cast down the staff that it become a large snake (8-9).**
- **b They did as He commanded and it became a snake in front of Pharaoh and his servants (10).**
- **b Pharaoh then called forth his wise men, sorcerers and magicians and they did the same (11).**
- **a When they did so Aaron's staff swallowed up their staves, thus revealing a further wonder. But Pharaoh's heart was hardened and he did not listen to their words just as Yahweh had declared 12-(13).**

Thus in 'a' they perform a wonder by their staff turning into a large snake, while in the parallel there is another wonder as their staff eats up the staves of the magicians. In 'b' their turning their staff into a snake is paralleled by the Egyptians doing the same.

7.8-10 'And Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron saying, "When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, 'Show a wonder in your support.' Then you will say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh so that it becomes a large snake (tannin).'" And Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and they did just as Yahweh had commanded them, and Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants and it became a large snake.'

Moses and Aaron again approached Pharaoh and his high officials (his servants). He was now aware that they came in the name of Yahweh so he challenged them. 'Support your case with a

show of divine power, a 'wonder'.' So they did so. Aaron threw down the staff and it became a large snake.

The word for snake here is 'tannin', different from that in 4.13 and verse 15 below. It possibly refers to a larger snake. It was also the word used for sea creatures and large reptiles such as crocodiles, including mythical monsters. But it may just be used for variation here and so that the reader will link it with the ideas of demi-gods, seeing the snake as a symbol of them.

The staff Aaron threw down was probably that of Moses which he now carried as a symbol of Moses' authority and status (he certainly used it in 4.30). It may, however, have been his own. It is called Aaron's staff (7.12) but that is not necessarily significant. It could mean only that he was the bearer of it. But it matters little. God was not limited in His use of staves.

Pharaoh was probably not impressed. He had seen things like this before. 'Signs and wonders' on a minuscule scale were the forte of magicians around the world, and especially in Egypt where they proliferated. They were like the prominent conjurers of today.

7.11-12a 'Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers and they also, the magicians of Egypt did just the same with their enchantments, for they threw down, every man, his staff, and they became snakes.'

The wise men and magicians were also able to do what appeared to be a similar thing. Their staves also became snakes. It would in fact appear that the Egyptian cobra can be rendered immobile if pressure is applied to the muscles at the nape of the neck after it has been charmed. This procedure is pictured on several ancient Egyptian scarab-amulets and was presumably the technique employed here. Alternately this may have been done by conjuring.

The wise men and the sorcerers'. These would have had long training in sacred writings, rituals and spells in temple schools. They were not averse to using conjuring and performing 'wonders' in order to impress the uninitiated. Egypt's greatest magicians were the hry-tp (compare Hebrew hartom - magician), the chief lector-priests.

7.12b 'But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staves.'

It is significant that it says 'staff' and not 'snake'. The staff was the symbol of authority and status. Thus we have here Moses' and Aaron's authority and status revealed as greater than that of the magicians. This should have given Pharaoh pause for thought, especially as the snake had significance in Egyptian mythology as a semi-divine creature and Pharaoh himself often bore the symbol of the uraeus-snake on his head for protection when he went into battle. The power of Moses was thereby revealed. Pharaoh's protective snake will do him no good. It will be eaten up.

This incident should have brought home to Pharaoh that the serpents of Egypt with all their significance, stood no chance against Yahweh. He was Lord over all, and could swallow everything whole whether earthly or heavenly.

7.13 'And Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not listen to them, just as Yahweh had said.'

In 4.21 Yahweh had said that He would harden Pharaoh's heart. Yahweh was seen by His people as, and revealed Himself as, sovereign over all. Everything that took place was therefore seen to be as a result of His activity. So in one sense if men hardened their hearts it was because Yahweh had done it. But the use of the passive tense lets us realise that here the action was indirect rather than direct. Pharaoh had taken up such an attitude that he was engaged in hardening his own heart. Yahweh did not make a good man evil, He allowed an evil man full

sway in his evil. Pharaoh was not an innocent tool, but totally blameworthy.

We note here that God was gradually revealing His power to Pharaoh. He began with lesser wonders which could partly be duplicated but through which He demonstrated His superiority, and would then move on to greater. Had Pharaoh been discerning there would have been no problem and no plagues. And God is like this with all men. He does not force Himself on them but gives them indications of His power and presence. Then it depends on their response whether they receive more. Yet at the same time He works His sovereign will.

(Note for Christians.

Moses had been a shepherd, but now, because he had obeyed God, he had become as 'a god'. Each of us can be 'gods' in the place where He has put us. For if we are Christians it is not only we who are there but within us is the living God. Christ lives through us. And as we allow Him to do so day by day so will God be present in all the situations around us. For we are the main means by which God seeks to break through into the world. If we fail to reveal Him the world will never know Him.

Being a god would not be easy for Moses. Things lay ahead that he had never dreamed of. But he learned here from the beginning through the sign of the snake that whatever Satan threw against him God could gobble it up. Thus did he have nothing to fear. If you are a Christian people may multiply snakes against you. But do not be afraid, for if you look to Him, God will gobble them up. He will 'bruise Satan under your feet shortly' (Romans 16.20).