

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary
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10 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh. For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display these My signs among them,² and that you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons’ sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the LORD.”³ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי-אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת-לְבוֹ וְאֶת-לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן שְׂתִי אֹתוֹתַי אֵלָה בְּקִרְבּוֹ: ² וְלִמְעַן תִּסְפָּר בְּאָזְנֵי בְנֶךָ וּבְזֵבֵי בְנֶךָ אֵת אֲשֶׁר הִתְעַלְלֹתִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-אֹתוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר-שָׂמֵתִי בָּם וַיִּדְעֻתֶם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה: ³ וַיָּבֹאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים עַד-מָתַי מֵאַנֶּת לַעֲנֹת מִפְּנֵי שְׁלַח עִמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי:

THE PLAGUES (continued)

EIGHTH PLAGUE: LOCUSTS (*arbeh*) (10:1–20)

The locust swarm is one of the worst scourges. An area of one square kilometer can contain 50 million such insects; in a single night they can devour 100,000 tons of vegetation. Unusually humid weather conditions contribute to their proliferation. A long section containing some new features introduces the plague. The courtiers boldly challenge Pharaoh, who makes concessions in advance of the actual plague. The plague serves not only to coerce the Egyptians but also to educate the Israelites.

1. I have hardened his heart See Comment to 4:21.

in order that The multiplication of these

“signs” enhances the evidence pointing to God’s power.

2. that you may recount Moses is addressed as the personification of the people Israel, for whom the message is really intended. Hence, in Hebrew the last verb (for “that you may know”) is in the plural form. As the cycle of plagues draws to its inevitable conclusion, its larger historical significance is brought into view. The events are to be indelibly marked on the collective memory of the people Israel and thus become a permanent part of the lore that is transmitted from generation to generation.

I made a mockery This was done by humbling the mighty Egyptian state, by humiliating Pharaoh, its “divine” king, and by exposing the impotence of its gods.

The events of this *parashah* record the birth of the Israelite people. Three final plagues, each more devastating than the one before, force Pharaoh to relent. In anticipation of their leaving, the Israelites celebrate the first *Pesah*, which will shape the annual celebration of the event for generations to come. Halfway through the *parashah*, the tone of the Torah changes from narrative to legislation, as the Israelites are given commands for marking *Pesah* and for re-enacting it in future generations.

CHAPTER 10

1. I have hardened his heart Pharaoh’s repeated refusals to let the slaves go have made it virtually impossible for him to change now.

In effect, he has given away his freedom to decide. The talmudic sage Resh Lakish is quoted as saying, “When God warns someone once, twice, and even a third time and that person does not repent, then and only then does God close the person’s heart against repentance and exact punishment for his sins.” Nonetheless, the sensitive reader is bothered by this notion of God setting Pharaoh up for punishment by making inevitable a situation in which he will not be allowed to repent. Although the Torah may find it necessary to emphasize the Exodus as God’s triumph over the forces of tyranny and idolatry, later texts will portray God as grieving for the Egyptians who are also God’s children and suffer because of Pharaoh’s stubbornness.

go that they may worship Me. ⁴For if you refuse to let My people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts on your territory. ⁵They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall devour the surviving remnant that was left to you after the hail; and they shall eat away all your trees that grow in the field. ⁶Moreover, they shall fill your palaces and the houses of all your courtiers and of all the Egyptians—something that neither your fathers nor fathers' fathers have seen from the day they appeared on earth to this day.” With that he turned and left Pharaoh’s presence.

⁷Pharaoh’s courtiers said to him, “How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship the LORD their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?” ⁸So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them, “Go, worship the LORD your God! Who are the ones to go?” ⁹Moses replied, “We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe the LORD’s festival.” ¹⁰But he said to them, “The LORD be with you the same as I mean to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief. ¹¹No! You menfolk go and worship the LORD, since that is what you want.” And they were expelled from Pharaoh’s presence.

4 כִּי אִם־מָאֵן אַתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־עַמִּי הַנִּנְי מִבֵּיא מִחַר אַרְבֶּה בְּגִבְלָךָ: ⁵ וְכִסָּה אֶת־עֵין הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא יוּכַל לְרַאֲתָא אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאָכַל | אֶת־יִתֵּר הַפְּלֹטָה הַנִּשְׁאָרָת לָכֶם מִן־הַבָּרָד וְאָכַל אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵץ הַצֹּמַח לָכֶם מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה: ⁶ וּמָלְאוּ בְתֵיךָ וּבְתֵי כָל־עַבְדֶּיךָ וּבְתֵי כָל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־רָאוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֲבוֹת אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִיּוֹם הַיּוֹתָם עַל־הָאָדָמָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּפֶן וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פְּרָעָה:

7 וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי פְרָעָה אֵלָיו עַד־מַתִּי יִהְיֶה זֶה לָנוּ לְמוֹקֵשׁ שְׁלַח אֶת־הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הַטֶּרֶם תִּדְעַ כִּי אֲבָדָה מִצְרַיִם: ⁸ וַיּוֹשֵׁב אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶל־פְּרָעָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם לָכוּ עַבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם מִי וּמִי הַהֹלְכִים: ⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְנֵעָרֵינוּ וּבְזִקְנֵינוּ נֵלֶךְ וּבְבָנֵינוּ וּבְבָנוֹתֵנוּ בְּצֹאנֵנוּ וּבְבָקָרֵנוּ נֵלֶךְ כִּי חַג־יְהוָה לָנוּ: ¹⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יְהִי כֵן יְהוָה עִמָּכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר אֲשַׁלַּח אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְּכֶם רְאוּ כִּי רָעָה נִגַּד פְּנֵיכֶם: ¹¹ לֹא כֵן לְכוּ־נָא הַגְּבָרִים וְעַבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה כִּי אַתָּה אַתֶּם מְבַקְשִׁים וַיַּגְרֵשׁ אֹתָם מֵאֶת פְּנֵי פְרָעָה: פ

6. *your . . . fathers' fathers* A counterpoint to “your sons’ sons” in verse 2. For Israel, the future is one of enduring inspiration and celebration. For Egypt, the past is recalled to paint a picture of impending catastrophe.

7. *this one* A disrespectful allusion to Moses. *a snare* We are inviting disaster.

9. *the LORD’s festival* Hebrew: *hag*. See Comment to 5:1.

10. *you are bent on mischief* The literal meaning of the Hebrew—“evil is before your faces”—has given rise to various interpretations: “You have evil intentions,” i.e., you do not intend to return after three days, or “you are foredoomed to disaster,” an understanding that would seem to be supported by 32:12.

11. The women and children are to be held hostage to ensure the return of the men.

9. *young and old* Why does Moses emphasize “young and old”? One commentator states, “because no celebration is complete without children.” A second adds, “a child without parents is an orphan, but a nation

without children is an orphan people.” Still another takes the words to mean, “We will go with our old people who feel rejuvenated at the prospect of living in freedom.”

¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, “Hold out your arm over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat up all the grasses in the land, whatever the hail has left.” ¹³So Moses held out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD drove an east wind over the land all that day and all night; and when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. ¹⁴Locusts invaded all the land of Egypt and settled within all the territory of Egypt in a thick mass; never before had there been so many, nor will there ever be so many again. ¹⁵They hid all the land from view, and the land was darkened; and they ate up all the grasses of the field and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt.

¹⁶Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “I stand guilty before the LORD your God and before you. ¹⁷Forgive my offense just this once, and plead with the LORD your God that He but remove this death from me.” ¹⁸So he left Pharaoh’s presence and pleaded with the LORD. ¹⁹The LORD caused a shift to a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and hurled them into the Sea of Reeds; not a single locust remained in all the territory of Egypt. ²⁰But the LORD stiffened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

²¹Then the LORD said to Moses, “Hold out

שני ¹² וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֲרָבָה וַיַּעַל עַל־אֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאֶרֶץ אֲתָם
כָּל־אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁאִיר הַבָּרָד: ¹³ וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה
אֶת־מִטְּהוֹ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיְהוּה נֶהַג
רוּחַ קָדִים בְּאֶרֶץ כָּל־הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְכָל־
הַלַּיְלָה הַבֹּקֶר הָיָה וְרוּחַ הַקָּדִים נִשְׂא
אֶת־הָאֲרָבָה: ¹⁴ וַיַּעַל הָאֲרָבָה עַל כָּל־
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּנַח בְּכָל גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם כְּבָד
מְאֹד לְפָנָיו לֹא־הָיָה בֵּן אֲרָבָה כְּמֹהוּ
וַאֲחֲרָיו לֹא יִהְיֶה־בֶּן: ¹⁵ וַיִּכַּס אֶת־עֵין
כָּל־הָאֶרֶץ וַתַּחֲשֶׁךְ הָאֶרֶץ וַיֹּאכַל אֶת־
כָּל־עֵשֶׂב הָאֶרֶץ וְאֵת כָּל־פְּרֵי הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר
הוֹתִיר הַבָּרָד וְלֹא־נֹתַר כָּל־יֵרֶק בְּעֵץ
וּבְעֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

¹⁶ וַיִּמְהַר פָּרְעֹה לְקַרְא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן
וַיֹּאמֶר חָטַאתִי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְלָכֶם:
¹⁷ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא חַטָּאתִי אִנִּי הַפְּעַם
וְהַעֲתִירוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וַיִּסַּר מֵעָלַי רַק
אֶת־הַפְּנוֹת הַזֶּה: ¹⁸ וַיֵּצֵא מֵעַם פָּרְעֹה
וַיַּעֲתֵר אֶל־יְהוָה: ¹⁹ וַיַּהַפֵּךְ יְהוָה רוּחֵיָם
חֲזָק מְאֹד וַיִּשְׂא אֶת־הָאֲרָבָה וַיִּתְקַעְהוּ
יָמָה סוּף לֹא נִשְׂאֵר אֲרָבָה אַחַד בְּכָל
גְּבוּל מִצְרַיִם: ²⁰ וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב
פָּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: פ
²¹ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נְטֵה יָדְךָ עַל־

13. an east wind Hebrew *kadim*; a dry, withering wind that in the land of Israel blows from the east. The term does not necessarily indicate direction. Here, possibly originating in the Sahara.

14–15. An overstatement to convey something of the magnitude of the plague.

18. Moses and Aaron, having been recalled by Pharaoh, make no response to his plea. Their silence must have been especially humiliating to

Pharaoh, because he had dismissed them summarily only a short while before (v. 11).

NINTH PLAGUE: DARKNESS (*hoshekh*)

(vv. 21–29)

As before, the third in the series of plagues strikes with no warning. For three days the land is enveloped in darkness. This affliction could be explained in terms of the hot, dry wind (*hamsin*)

21. The Midrash calls the plague of darkness “the darkness of Hell/*Geihinnom*” (Exod. R.14:2); and it connects the darkness that af-

flicted Egypt with the primordial darkness that existed before God said, “Let there be light!” Just as the light of *Shabbat* is a foretaste of the

your arm toward the sky that there may be darkness upon the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be touched.”²² Moses held out his arm toward the sky and thick darkness descended upon all the land of Egypt for three days.²³ People could not see one another, and for three days no one could get up from where he was; but all the Israelites enjoyed light in their dwellings.

²⁴Pharaoh then summoned Moses and said, “Go, worship the LORD! Only your flocks and your herds shall be left behind; even your children may go with you.”²⁵ But Moses said, “You yourself must provide us with sacrifices and burnt offerings to offer up to the LORD our God; ²⁶our own livestock, too, shall go along with us—not a hoof shall remain behind: for we must select from it for the worship of the LORD our God; and we shall not know with what we are to worship the LORD until we arrive there.”

²⁷But the LORD stiffened Pharaoh’s heart and

הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ עַל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּמַּשׁ חֹשֶׁךְ: ²² וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ־אֲפֹלָה בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: ²³ לֹא־רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת־אָחִיו וְלֹא־קָמוּ אִישׁ מִתַּחַתָּיו שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים: וְלִכְל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֵיהֶם: ²⁴ וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר לְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת־יְהוָה רַק צֹאנְכֶם וּבְקָרְכֶם יֵצֵאוּ גַם־טַפְּכֶם יִלְךְ עִמָּכֶם: ²⁵ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה גַם־אֲתָה תִתֵּן בְּיַדְנוּ זְבָחִים וְעֹלוֹת וְעֹשִׂינוּ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ: ²⁶ וְגַם־מִקְנֵנוּ יִלְךְ עִמָּנוּ לֹא תִשָּׂאֵר פְּרִסָּה כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ נִקַּח לַעֲבֹד אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֲנַחְנוּ לֹא־נֵדַע מִה־נֵּעֲבֹד אֶת־יְהוָה עַד־בֹּאֵנוּ שָׁמָּה: ²⁷ וַיַּחֲזֶק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא אָבָה

שלישו

referred to in verse 13. The blotting out of sunlight for three days no doubt conveyed a powerful message to the Egyptians, for the sun was their supreme god. Its daily rising was seen as a triumph over the snake demon Apophis, the embodiment of darkness. The plague of darkness would have had the devastating psychological effect of revealing to the Egyptians the impotence

of their supreme god, thereby forecasting imminent doom.

21. that can be touched This probably refers to sand, dust, and soil particles that filled the air.

25. You yourself He who contemptuously denied all knowledge of *YHVH* will, in the end, provide sacrifices for Him in acknowledgment of His reality and power.

world to come, the reward that awaits the righteous, the darkness of the ninth plague is a foretaste of *Geihinnom*, the punishment that awaits those who cannot truly see their neighbors, who cannot feel the pain and recognize the dignity of their afflicted neighbors.

23. During all the other plagues, the average Egyptian could do nothing to end them. During a plague of darkness, however, could Egyptians not light candles? Perhaps the plague was not a physical darkness, a sandstorm, or a solar eclipse (eclipses last for a few minutes, never for three days); perhaps it was a spiritual or psychological darkness, a deep depression. (The word “melancholy” comes from a Greek root meaning “dark mood.”) People suffering from depression lack the energy to move about or to be concerned with anyone other than themselves, precisely as the

Torah describes the Egyptians. Perhaps the Egyptians were depressed by the series of calamities that had struck them or by the realization of how much their own comfort depended on the enslavement of others. The person who cannot see his neighbor is incapable of spiritual growth, incapable of rising from where he is currently. In Jewish legal discussion defining how early one may recite the morning prayers, “dawn” is defined as “when one can recognize the face of a friend” (BT Ber. 9b). When one can see other people and recognize them as friends, the darkness has begun to lift.

26. we shall not know with what we are to worship the LORD until we arrive there God makes unique demands on each of us. We cannot know what God wants of us until we encounter God in each new stage of our lives.

he would not agree to let them go. ²⁸Pharaoh said to him, “Be gone from me! Take care not to see me again, for the moment you look upon my face you shall die.” ²⁹And Moses replied, “You have spoken rightly. I shall not see your face again!”

לְשַׁחֵם: ²⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר-לוֹ פֶּרַעֲהוּ לֵךְ מֵעָלַי
הַשָּׁמֶר לְךָ אֶל-הַתְּסִף רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בְיוֹם
רְאִיתְךָ פָּנַי תָּמוּת: ²⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בֵּן
דְּבַרְתָּ לֹא-אֶסֶף עוֹד רְאוֹת פָּנָיִךְ: פ

11 And the LORD said to Moses, “I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all. ²Tell the people to borrow, each man from his neighbor and each woman from hers, objects of silver and gold.” ³The LORD disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people. Moreover, Moses himself was

יא וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה עוֹד נִגַע
אֶחָד אָבִיא עַל-פְּרַעֲהוּ וְעַל-מִצְרָיִם
אֶחָרִי-כֵן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה בְּשַׁלְּחוֹ כְּלָה
גֶרֶשׁ יִגְרַשׁ אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה: ² דַּבְּרִינָא בְּאָזְנֵי
הָעָם וַיִּשְׁאַלּוּ אִישׁ מֵאִתּוֹ רְעֵהוּ וְאִשָּׁהּ
מֵאִתּוֹ רְעוּתָהּ כְּלֵי-כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי זָהָב: ³ וַיִּתֵּן
יְהוָה אֶת-חַן הָעָם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם גַּם |

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE TENTH PLAGUE (11:1–10)

Pharaoh has closed the door on any further negotiations with Moses. The natural disasters have left the despot even more unyielding than before. A final blow, one wholly beyond nature or any previous human experience, is now about to descend on the Egyptians.

1–3. These verses seem parenthetical. It must be assumed that Moses received this message in the palace as he was about to leave, for verse 8 shows that he conveyed its content to Pharaoh.

1. he will drive you out The Exodus will no longer be a concession by Pharaoh. He will want your swift departure.

one and all Without restriction, exactly as Moses had demanded.

2. Tell the people Throughout the plagues, there has been no reported communication between Moses and the Israelites. Now that his mission to Pharaoh is concluded, he once again turns his attention to internal matters.

to borrow See Comment to 3:21–22.

3. disposed . . . favorably The Egyptians willingly part with their possessions.

CHAPTER 11

2. “During the plague of darkness, the Israelites could have plundered the homes of the Egyptians. When the Egyptians saw that the Israelites had not done so, they realized the moral greatness of that people and were inclined to give them the silver and gold they asked for” (Hirsch). One psychologist sees the message of the plagues as teaching Israel that “external forces can sometimes help us even when we cannot help ourselves.” Thus we come to believe that, despite our prior experiences, the universe can be supportive of our hopes.

Pharaoh, who once decreed death for the Israelite male children, will now see the children of his own people struck down. God has tried

everything to persuade Pharaoh to relent, to no avail. Of course, God could have struck Egypt with this plague first, but hoped that lesser punishments would bring about the desired result. It turned out that the society that benefited from slaying the Israelite children will now pay the price. Most modern readers are troubled by the sins of the parents being visited on their children, but the ancient mind did not have the concept of separate individual identities that we have today. The child was part of the parent, not a separate individual. To punish a child for a parent’s sin was no more unjust than whipping a person’s back for a crime his hand had committed. However, the later Israelite prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel would repudiate this attitude in God’s name, as would the Torah itself, in Deut. 24:16.

much esteemed in the land of Egypt, among Pharaoh's courtiers and among the people.

⁴Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: Toward midnight I will go forth among the Egyptians, ⁵and every first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the first-born of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; and all the first-born of the cattle. ⁶And there shall be a loud cry in all the land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again; ⁷but not a dog shall snarl at any of the Israelites, at man or beast—in order that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

⁸"Then all these courtiers of yours shall come down to me and bow low to me, saying, 'Depart, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will depart." And he left Pharaoh's presence in hot anger.

⁹Now the LORD had said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not heed you, in order that My marvels may be multiplied in the land of Egypt."¹⁰Moses and Aaron had performed all these marvels before Pharaoh, but the LORD had stiffened the heart

הָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה גָּדוֹל מְאֹד בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
בְּעֵינֵי עַבְדֵי-פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי הָעָם: ס
רביעי 4 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה כַּחֲצֹת
הַלַּיְלָה אֲנִי יוֹצֵא בְּתוֹךְ מִצְרַיִם: 5 וּמֵת
כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר פַּרְעֹה
הַיֹּשֵׁב עַל-כִּסֵּאוֹ עַד בְּכוֹר הַשֹּׁפְחָה אֲשֶׁר
אֲחַר הָרְחִים וְכֹל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: 6 וְהִיתָה
צְעָקָה גְדֹלָה בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר
כָּמְהוּ לֹא נִהְיְתָה וְכִמְהוּ לֹא תִסָּף:
7 וְלֹכֵל | בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַרְץ-כְּלָב לְשׁוֹ
לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּן אֲשֶׁר
יַפְלֶה יְהוָה בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל:
8 וַיִּרְדּוּ כָל-עַבְדֵיךָ אֵלַי וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לִי
לֵאמֹר צֵא אֵתָהּ וְכָל-הָעָם אֲשֶׁר-בְּרַגְלֶיךָ
וְאֲחֵרֶיכֶן אֲצֵא וְיֵצֵא מֵעַם-פַּרְעֹה בְּחַרְיִ-
אָף: ס

9 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֹא-יִשְׁמַע
אֲלֵיכֶם פַּרְעֹה לְמַעַן רַבּוֹת מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם: 10 וּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן עָשׂוּ אֶת-כָּל-
הַמִּפְתָּיִם הָאֵלֶּה לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיַּחֲזֶק

Moses himself An additional reason for the Egyptian people's response.

4. Toward midnight When everyone would be at home. For psychological effect, the specific night is not disclosed.

5. For the first time, Pharaoh personally will be afflicted.

from . . . Pharaoh . . . to . . . the slave girl No one will be spared.

millstones The utensil with which grain was ground into flour. Grain was placed between two pieces of stone. The smaller, upper stone was moved back and forth by hand over the larger, stationary stone. This tedious, menial labor was performed by slave girls and captives.

first-born of the cattle These were included because they were objects of Egyptian worship. The Egyptians might have ascribed their misfor-

tune to the work of their own animal-shaped gods instead of to *YHVH*.

6. a loud cry The Hebrew word *tz'akah* is the very term used to express Israel's misery under Egyptian enslavement. The anguished cry of the oppressed is now supplanted by the cry of their oppressors and tormentors.

7. By contrast, the departing Israelites will encounter no resistance.

8. in hot anger At Pharaoh's death threat (10:28).

9–10. These summarizing verses conclude the saga that began in chapter 7, just as the summarizing verses of chapter 6 bring to completion the first section of the book. Moses' negotiations with Pharaoh are over. He never speaks to him again. (Pharaoh, however, speaks to Moses for the last time in 12:31–32.)

5. first-born of the slave Non-Israelite slaves certainly did not have power in that society, so why would they be punished? Because they did not make common cause with the

Israelites, saying, "let us join hands and rise together against our oppressors." Bad as their lives were, they took perverse satisfaction in knowing that there were others even worse off.

of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go from his land.

יְהוָה אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא-שָׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרְצוֹ: פ

12 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ²This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. ³Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

יב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: ² הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רְאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה: ³ דַּבְּרוּ אֶל-כָּל-עַדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם

THE LAST ACT (12:1–51)

This chapter, a composite of several strands of tradition, contains a number of literary units. Each unit centers on an aspect of the Exodus events. Some of these units deal with immediate concerns, such as the last-minute preparations for the departure from Egypt; others relate to the enduring effect of the events in shaping the future course of Israel’s life as a people.

REFORM OF THE CALENDAR (v. 2)

The impending Exodus is visualized as the start of a new order of life that will be dominated by the consciousness of God’s active presence in history. The religious calendar of Israel is henceforth to reflect this reality by numbering the months of the year from the month of the Exodus.

This month Elsewhere it is called “the month of Abib,” meaning literally “when the ears of barley ripen,” referring to the spring (March and April). The month of Abib is nowadays known as Nisan.

first of the months The Hebrew months, like the days of the week in Hebrew, are called by

numbers. The absence of names may be due to the desire to avoid any connection with the ancient calendars that associated days and months with heavenly bodies or pagan deities and rituals. There is evidence that at least some Israelite months once had Canaanite-Phoenician names, because the Bible refers to the months of Ziv (1 Kings 6:1), Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), and Bul (1 Kings 6:38). The names of months now used by Jews were borrowed from the Babylonian calendar during the first exile.

THE PASCHAL OFFERING (vv. 3–13)

The laws relating to the sacrificial meal that is to take place immediately before the Exodus are now set forth in detail.

3. community of Israel The word translated as “community” (*edah*, from a root meaning “to come together”) was the term used to designate the people Israel acting as a covenant community, in relation to worship.

tenth of this month The completion of the first 10 days of the lunar month apparently held

CHAPTER 12

2. This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months One of the first steps in the process of liberation was for the Israelites to have their own calendar, their own way of keeping track of time and recalling the most important days of their people’s history. A slave does not control his or her own time; it belongs to someone else. Hirsch wrote that “the Jewish calendar is the Jewish catechism,” for it is the most concise summary of what we remember and what we stand for. Why does Israel count by the moon, with each month start-

ing when the new moon emerges? Because the moon, unlike the sun, waxes and wanes, nearly disappears and then grows bright again. So the Jewish people go through cycles of prosperity and suffering, knowing that even in darkness there are brighter days ahead (*S’fat Emet*). “Just as God showed Noah the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, God shows Moses the sliver of the new moon as a symbol of Israel’s capacity for constant renewal” (Hirsch).

3. The next step toward liberation was to slaughter a lamb publicly, something no Egyptian would do, and mark the doorpost with its blood. In this way, they would proclaim their

⁴But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day

אִישׁ שֶׁהָ לְבֵית-אָבֹתָ שֶׁהָ לְבֵיתָ: ⁴ וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבֵּית מֵהֵיט מִשֶּׁהָ וְלִקַּח הוּא וְשִׁכְנֹו הַקָּרֹב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵת נַפְשֹׁת אִישׁ לְפִי אֲכָלוֹ תִכְסּוּ עַל-הַשֶּׁהָ: ⁵ שֶׁהָ תָמִים זָכָר בֶּן-שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן-הַבְּבָשִׁים וּמִן-הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ: ⁶ וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ עַד אַרְבַּעַה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ

some sort of special significance now lost to us. Yom Kippur, the most sacred day in the religious calendar, falls on the 10th of the seventh month, and in ancient times this same date ushered in the jubilee year. Joshua chose the 10th of the first month to cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan.

a lamb See verse 5 and Deut. 14:4. The Hebrew word *seh* can mean both “a lamb” and “a kid of the goats.” In light of the fear expressed in Exod. 8:22, this act broke the sense of dread felt by the enslaved Israelites and removed the psychological barrier to liberation.

a family The Hebrew phrase *beit avot* literally means “a house of fathers” and is a subunit of a clan (the biblical *mishpahah*). It is made up of a husband, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters and sons, and his married sons with their wives and unmarried children.

a household Originally, the paschal celebration was a domestic experience. Later it became a pilgrimage festival.

4. too small In Second Temple times, a minimum quorum of 10 participants was required for this ritual. The actual slaughtering of the animal was performed in the presence of no fewer than 30.

will eat The eating of the animal is an essential part of the ritual. By means of this sacrificial meal, kinship ties are strengthened, family and neighborly solidarity is promoted, and communion with God is established.

5. without blemish A defective gift is an insult to the recipient; hence the harmony between the one who brings the gift and God would be impaired by such a gift.

6. keep watch The animal, selected on the 10th of the month, is to be carefully protected

psychological liberation from fear of Egyptian opinion and from an eagerness to imitate Egyptian customs, a necessary prerequisite to physical liberation. The Sages see the lamb as a symbol of idol worship, and its public slaughter as a repudiation of idolatry. It has also been noted that in times of drastic change people need specific, action-oriented advice. This gives them a sense of control over a chaotic situation, as we see with mourning customs in the wake of a death.

The shared meal, with *matzah* and bitter herbs (v. 8), will become the prototype of the *Pesah Seider*, when we not only remember but strive to re-enact our ancestors' deliverance from Egypt. Members of some communities come to the *Seider* table with sandals on their feet and a staff in their hand (v. 11), as if they were setting out on a journey to freedom.

Although we celebrate *Rosh ha-Shanah*, beginning a new year, in the fall, the Hebrew calendar actually begins in the spring with *Nisan*, the month of *Pesah*, as the first month. *Tishrei*, the month of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, is the seventh month (see Lev.

23:23ff.). Some scholars see this as a compromise among ancient cultures, those who celebrated the beginning of the new year in the spring when the harsh winter rains were over and the plants and flowers re-emerged, versus those who celebrated the new year in the fall when the rains returned to replenish the land after summer's harsh drought. We can see it as analogous to our beginning a new calendar year in January but marking our personal age on our birthday. Thus *Rosh ha-Shanah* is seen as the anniversary of the creation of the world, marking our shared humanity with other peoples; *Pesah* is the birthday of the people Israel, symbolizing our special destiny as Jews.

4. Like so much of Judaism, *Pesah*, although a family celebration, is not to be observed in isolation. It is an occasion for families to join with other families and create a community. More than the poor need the rich, the rich need the poor. Let those whose households are too small to absorb all the blessings that God has given them seek out their neighbors and share the bounty with them (Hirsch).

of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted—head, legs, and entrails—over the fire. ¹⁰You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it.

¹¹This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff

הַזֶּה וְשָׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קֵהַל עֲדַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל
בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים: ⁷ וְלָקְחוּ מִן-הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ
עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוּף עַל
הַבְּתָיִם אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: ⁸ וְאָכְלוּ
אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת
עַל-מֵרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ: ⁹ אַל-תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ
זָא וּבָשָׂל מִבָּשָׂל בַּמַּיִם כִּי אִם-צְלִי-אֵשׁ
רֹאשׁוֹ עַל-כַּרְעָיו וְעַל-קִרְבּוֹ: ¹⁰ וְלֹא-
תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וְהִנְתַּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-
בֹּקֶר בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרְפוּ:
¹¹ וְכַכֵּה תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְּנִיכֶם חֲגָרִים
נְעִלְיֶכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמִקְלָכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם

from blemish for four days until it is slaughtered. No reason for the interval is given.

7. According to verses 13 and 23, the daubing at the entrances served to identify the houses of the Israelites, for the blood is designated “a sign.” Blood was a readily available coloring substance; it also possessed symbolic significance because it was looked on as the life essence. The lintel and doorposts form the demarcation between the sacred Israelite interior and the profane world outside.

8–9. Unlike other offerings, this one (called *pesah* in v.11) is roasted. Roasting may have been required here because it is the quickest means of preparation when time is short, or because it is the most effective way of extracting the blood. Deut. 16:7 instructs that this passover offering is to be boiled like a normal sacrifice.

8. **unleavened bread** The Hebrew for “unleavened bread” (*matzot*, singular *matzah*) is introduced without definition or explanation, implying that it is already well known and, hence, independent of the Exodus events. The contexts suggest a kind of flat cake that can be prepared

quickly for unexpected guests (see Gen. 19:3). This verse witnesses the integration of the originally separate *matzot* festival with the Passover celebration. See Comments to Exod. 12:14–20.

bitter herbs The Hebrew word *m'rorim* (singular *maror*) probably referred originally to the kind of pungent condiment with which pastoral nomads habitually season their meals of roasted flesh. In rabbinic tradition, the plant referred to five different species of herbs, including lettuce (*hassah*), a vegetable known to have been cultivated in ancient Egypt.

10. A sacrificial animal is devoted in its entirety to a sacred purpose. This is so even when the offering is eaten by the worshipers and not wholly burned on the altar. The intentional act of eating at the designated time is an indispensable part of the ritual. Any leftovers retain their sacred status but may no longer be consumed and must be burned.

11. **loins girded** The standard dress consisted of a flowing shirtlike garment that was tightened by a sash wrapped around the waist when greater maneuverability was called for. The

7. Was the blood on the doorpost a sign that this family had the courage to defy their Egyptian neighbors and demonstrate an inner liberation? Was it perhaps a sign that this family has already suffered and should be spared? Or was it simply that this family had complied with

God's command? Could God not distinguish between Israelite and Egyptian homes? The Talmud says that once a plague has begun, it does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked (BT BK 60a). Some means was needed to mark the homes that merited being spared.

in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the LORD. ¹²For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD. ¹³And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the

וְאֶכְלֹתֶם אֹתוֹ בְּחֶפְזוֹן פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה :
 וְעִבְרֹתַי בְּאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה ¹²
 וְהַפִּיתִי כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם
 וְעַד-בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה
 שְׁפָטִים אָנֹכִי יְהוָה : ¹³וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם
 לְאֵת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׂם וְרָאִיתִי
 אֶת-הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה בְּכֶם
 נֹגֵף לְמִשְׁחִית בְּהַפֹּתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם :
 וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגְתֶּם ¹⁴
 אֹתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם

climactic moment of liberation is imminent, and the Israelites must be prepared for immediate departure.

a passover offering The Hebrew noun “*pesah*” has given rise to the English adjective “paschal,” used to designate the Passover lamb, the Passover holiday, and Easter. Like the word “*matzah*,” *pesah* is assumed in this narrative to be an immediately understandable term, so it too must have a history that predates the Exodus. The etymology of the word is uncertain, although it may be related to an Akkadian root meaning “to appease.” Three traditions about the meaning of the stem פסח have survived: “to have compassion,” “to protect,” and “to skip over” (see 12:13). Strictly speaking, as noted in the Comments to verses 14–20, only the 14th day of the month can be called *Pesah*; but in the course of time, this term was extended to cover the entire week of the festival.

12. I will go through An example of anthropomorphism, attributing a human activity to God. Here it may be used to make His active presence in history more vividly and dramatically perceived. Despite this emphatic statement, however, tradition frequently speaks of the Angel of Death, not God, as “the destroyer.”

to all the gods of Egypt God’s power to take Israel out of Egypt manifests His own exclusivity, mocks the professed divinity of Pharaoh, and exposes the deities of Egypt as non-gods.

13. The first section of the chapter concludes with an assurance that no harm will befall the

Israelites. This is necessary because fulfillment of the preceding instructions is fraught with peril, and the coming period of inaction will allow anxiety to surface.

THE FESTIVAL OF MATZOT (vv. 14–20)

The previous rites deal with a specific time and situation—the Passover of Egypt. The Exodus now becomes an experience stamped for all time on Israel’s memory and imagination, shaping forever its religious consciousness and traditions. Verse 14 establishes an annual festival of remembrance; the subsequent verses explain how it is to be observed.

The focus is on the festival of *matzot*, “unleavened bread.” Without doubt, throughout the biblical period this celebration remained distinct from the one-day paschal rite. Indeed, the next chapter (13:6–8) establishes the laws of *matzot* and makes no mention of the paschal sacrifice. Lev. 23:5–6 similarly differentiates the one from the other: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the LORD, and on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Special Passovers were celebrated in the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah, both of whom were associated with major reformations (see 2 Chron. 30, 35). We are told in Ezra 6:19–22 that when the exiles returned from Babylon they “celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month,” and then “joyfully celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.”

14. The topic and tone of the Torah narrative now shifts seamlessly but significantly from instructions to Moses’ contemporaries to

listing *mitzvot* to be followed by Jews in later generations—not so as to effect the Exodus but in order to remember it.

LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

¹⁶You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them; only what every person is to eat, that alone may be

תִּחְגְּלוּ: ¹⁵שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצּוֹת תֹּאכְלוּ
אֶף בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שָׂאֵר
מִבְּתֵיכֶם כִּי אֶל-אֲכָל חֵמֶץ וְנִכְרַתָּהּ
הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן
עַד-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

¹⁶וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ וּבַיּוֹם
הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-
מְלָאכָה לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֶף אִשֶׁר
יֹאכַל לְכֹל-נֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבָדוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם:

14. throughout the ages That is, for future annual celebration.

15. The characteristics of the newly ordained festival are now stated: one week’s duration, the eating of *matzot*, and the removal of leaven. It is a new season of the year and a new era for the people Israel. One should not enter it with yeast collected from a previous time.

unleavened bread Stringent regulations govern the manufacture of *matzot*. The only ingredients are flour and water. The flour may be made only from grains that are susceptible to fermentation: wheat, barley, emmer, rye, and oats.

on the very first day Because festivals begin in the evening, this injunction traditionally has been taken to mean that the leaven must have been removed on the previous evening, before the time for the paschal offering on the 14th of the month.

remove leaven The positive command to eat *matzah* is supplemented by the strict prohibition against retaining or eating leaven or leavened food throughout the entire festival. This rule is repeated below in verses 19–20 and again in 13:7. Leaven (*s’or*) is the leavening agent known as sourdough; “leavened food” (*hametz*) is food to which sourdough has been added to accelerate the rising of the dough.

shall be cut off This punishment, known as *karet*, is largely confined to those who transgress in certain matters of religious worship and sexual behavior. Its nature is uncertain. Various biblical passages lead to the conclusion that *karet* is not a penalty enforced by the courts but a punishment left to divine execution.

16. The first and the last days of the festival possess special sanctity, but not to the same degree

15. shall be cut off *Pesah* is a fundamental statement of Jewish identity and the meaning and purpose of Jewish existence—so much so

that those who choose not to observe it can be seen as cutting themselves off from the Jewish people.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

12:15. remove leaven On the night before the *Seider*, there is a ritual search of the home (*B'dikat Hametz*) by candlelight. A feather and a spoon are used to collect pieces of bread or other leaven that had been hidden to stimulate the search. The next morning, any leavened product not otherwise stored and sold is disposed of, traditionally by burning (*Bi-ur Hametz*) (see Lev. 2:11; Deut. 16:3).

12:16. the seventh day This last day is considered to be as holy as the first; all restrictions apply equally to both. Outside Israel, two days are traditionally observed for each day defined as a *mikra kodesh* (sacred occasion) in the Torah, except for *Yom Kippur* (because the Sages judged that fasting for two days would be too burdensome). Before the calendar was established, news of the *Sanhedrin's* announcement of the new moon would not necessarily reach diaspora communities in time before a holiday, and so diaspora Jews observed a second day to be sure not to violate holy day prohibitions. Despite the subsequent creation of the Jewish calendar, adding a second day for each day the Torah designates as a sacred occasion remains the most widespread practice (MT Festivals 1:21). Therefore, the first and last days of *Pesah* are each observed for two days (for a total of eight days); the first day of *Sukkot* and *Sh'mini Atzeret* are each observed for two days (for a total of nine days); and *Shavuot* is observed for two days. The intermediate days of *Pesah* and *Sukkot* have some of the aspects of the festival's first and last days and some aspects of a weekday; hence the name *hol ha-mo'ed*, “the ordinary part of the festival.” *Rosh ha-Shanah* is observed for two days even in Israel, because it occurs at the very beginning of the month and even the Jews of Jerusalem could not determine when the new moon would be sighted and the holiday would begin.

prepared for you. ¹⁷You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time. ¹⁸In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

²¹Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the

17 וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמִּצְוֹת־זֵאת בְּעֶצְמָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־עַבְדְּבְאֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם: 18 בְּרֵאשִׁון בְּאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצֵּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב: 19 שְׁבַעֲת יָמִים שְׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתֵיכֶם כִּי כָל־אֶכָּל מִחֻמֶּצֶת וְנִכְרַתָּה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַד־תֵּת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאִזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: 20 כָּל־מִחֻמֶּצֶת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל־מוֹשְׁבֵיתֵיכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצֵּת: פ
21 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכָל־זְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִשְׁפַּחְתֵיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ הַפֶּסַח: 22 וְלָקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדַּת אִזּוֹב וְטַבַּלְתֶּם בָּדָם אֲשֶׁר־בַּסֶּף חמישי

as do *Shabbat* and the Day of Atonement. Hence the preparation of food on those festival days is permitted, exempted from the prohibition against labor.

17. The rationale for this springtime festival is now given.

You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread Understanding the phrase “*u-sh’martem et ha-matzot*” (literally, “guard the *matzot*”) in this way is based on the next phrase—“on this very day”—which takes the word “*matzot*” to mean the festival (*Hag ha-Matzot*). (For a parallel passage, see 23:15.)

I brought Better: “I am bringing.”

18. As specified in Lev. 23:32, the duration of all festivals is from evening to evening.

19. a stranger The Hebrew word *ger* is a foreigner who has taken up permanent residence

among the people Israel. Like his Israelite neighbor, he is required to abstain from possessing leaven for this one week, because its presence within the closely knit community interferes with the ability of others to fulfill their religious obligation. Only the Israelite, however, has the duty to eat *matzah*.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PESAH
ARE RELAYED (vv. 21–28)

Moses conveys to the people the divinely given instructions and supplements them with some clarifications.

21. Go, pick out Either select a lamb from your flock or purchase one.

22. a bunch of hyssop A brushlike plant. This explains how the directive of verse 7 is to be carried out. Three of the hyssop’s thin, woody

17. observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread Literally, “guard the *matzot*” (pl. of *matzah*). Traditional postbiblical Jewish interpretation

takes this to mean that one should supervise the process of making *matzot* to ensure that no fermentation occurs at any stage.

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

12:19. No leaven shall be found Because disposing of foods prohibited on *Pesah* could impose financial hardship, Jewish law permits food to be stored away in the home of the owner provided that for the duration of *Pesah* it is neither seen nor used and its ownership is transferred to a non-Jew. This sale of *hametz* (*M’khirat Hametz*) can be arranged through a rabbi. All foods prohibited during *Pesah* that are not sold in this manner must be disposed of before the holiday; otherwise they may not be used after *Pesah* (*hametz she-avar alav ha-Pesah*).

blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.²³ For when the LORD goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the LORD will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

²⁴“You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants.²⁵ And when you enter the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite.²⁶ And when your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this rite?’²⁷ you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.’”

The people then bowed low in homage.²⁸ And the Israelites went and did so; just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

וְהִגַּעְתֶּם אֶל-הַמִּשְׁקוֹף וְאֶל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת מִן-הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר בַּסֶּף וְאַתֶּם לֹא תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח-בֵּיתוֹ עַד-בֹּקֶר: ²³ וְעָבַר יְהוָה לַלַּיְלָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְרָאָה אֶת-הַדָּם עַל-הַמִּשְׁקוֹף וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וַפָּסַח יְהוָה עַל-הַפֶּתַח וְלֹא יִתֵּן הַמַּשְׁחִית לָבֵא אֶל-בְּתִיכֶם לַלַּיְלָה:

²⁴ וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְחֻק־לֶכֶד וּלְבְנֵיךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: ²⁵ וְהָיָה כִּי-תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן יְהוָה לְכֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת: ²⁶ וְהָיָה כִּי-יֹאמְרוּ אֵלֵיכֶם בְּנֵיכֶם מַה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לְכֶם: ²⁷ וְאָמַרְתֶּם זָבַח-פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה אֲשֶׁר פָּסַח עַל-בְּתֵי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם בְּנִגְפוֹ אֶת-מִצְרַיִם וְאֶת-בְּתֵינוּ הִצִּיל

וַיִּקַּד הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ: ²⁸ וַיֵּלְכוּ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כַּכֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת-מֹשֶׁה

וְאֵהָרִן כֵּן עָשׂוּ: ס

branches make an ideal applicator. It is often used in rites of purification.

None . . . shall go outside On this night of danger and vigilance, the Israelites would be most secure inside their homes.

23. Destroyer The plague, although personified, is not an independent demonic being. It can operate only within the limits set by God.

24. observe this Ramban notes that this refers to the slaughter of the passover offering, not to the daubing of the blood.

25. when you enter the land Apart from the celebration on the first anniversary of the Exodus, as described in Num. 9:1–5, no further mention of

the observance of Passover appears in the account of the wilderness wanderings until after the crossing of the river Jordan, as recorded in Josh. 5:2–12.

as He has promised To the patriarchs. See Comment to Exod. 6:8.

26–27. The ritual also serves a pedagogic function. Its oddities arouse the curiosity of children, presenting an opportunity to teach these traditions to the young.

our houses The passage of time never diminishes the significance of the events. The national culture is nurtured by their memory and by their repeated re-enactment, a theme later stressed in the *Pesah Haggadah*.

26. when your children ask you This is the origin of the familiar *Seider* custom of having the children present ask the Four Questions. Three references in this *parashah* to telling the story to our children and another in Deuteronomy gave rise to the *Haggadah* passage about the Four Children. Exodus 13:8 (“And you shall explain to your son”) em-

phasizes the parent’s role in informing children even if they do not ask, gearing our information to the child’s capacity for understanding. It is better to encourage children to ask questions while they are still at home and parents and teachers can respond to them, than to wait until others cause them to doubt and question.

²⁹In the middle of the night the LORD struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. ³⁰And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead. ³¹He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, “Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship the LORD as you said! ³²Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and begone! And may you bring a blessing upon me also!”

³³The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, for they said, “We shall all be dead.” ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders. ³⁵The Israelites had done Moses’ bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects

שִׁשִׁי ²⁹ וַיְהִי | בַּחֲצֵי הַלַּיְלָה וַיַּהֲרֹג אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם כָּל-
בְּכוֹרֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִבְּכוֹר פְּרֹעֹה הַיֹּשֵׁב
עַל-כִּסֵּאֹו עַד בְּכוֹר הַשְּׂבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית
הַבּוֹר וְכָל בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה: ³⁰ וַיָּקָם פְּרֹעֹה
לַיְלָה הוּא וְכָל-עַבְדָּיו וְכָל-מִצְרָיִם וַתְּהִי
צְעָקָה גְדֹלָה בְּמִצְרָיִם כִּי-אֵין בֵּית אֲשֶׁר
אֵין-שָׁם מֵת: ³¹ וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן
לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צֵאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם-
אֲתֶם גַּם-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּלְכוּ עִבְדוּ אֶת-
יְהוָה כְּדַבַּרְכֶם: ³² גַּם-צֹאנְכֶם גַּם-בְּקֹרְכֶם
קְחוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתֶּם וּלְכוּ וּבְרַכְתֶּם גַּם-
אֹתִי:

³³ וַתַּחֲזֹק מִצְרָיִם עַל-הָעָם לְמַהֵר
לְשַׁלְּחֵם מִן-הָאָרֶץ כִּי אָמְרוּ כָּלֵנוּ מֵתִים:
³⁴ וַיִּשְׂאֵהָ הָעָם אֶת-בִּצְקוֹ טָרֶם יַחְמֹץ
מִשְׂאֲרֵתָם צָרְרַת בְּשִׁמְלָתָם עַל-שִׁכְמָם:
³⁵ וּבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְּדַבַּר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׂאֲלוּ
מִמִּצְרָיִם כְּלֵי-כֶסֶף וְכֵלֵי זָהָב וּשְׂמֵלֹת:

TENTH PLAGUE (*makkat b'khorot*) (vv. 29–36)

All the preparations have been completed. The stage is set for the climactic plague, which will secure the release of the Israelites from bondage. The Torah recognizes that the entire Egyptian people is subject to judgment for having tolerated the perverse will of Pharaoh.

PHARAOH SURRENDERS (vv. 30–32)

The king himself has to rise during the night, thereby adding to his humiliation at having to surrender unconditionally to Moses’ demands. By summoning Moses and Aaron, he must retract the arrogant threat made at their last meet-

ing (10:28). He asks for their blessing, an ultimate humbling act.

31. Israelites Pharaoh uses this term for the first time, thereby at last granting recognition to the Israelites as a national entity. The narrative of the oppression opened with this term (1:1), and now closes with it.

34. before it was leavened In verse 39 this note is amplified in such a way as to provide a clear explanation for the eating of *matzot* on Passover. A similar reason is given in Deut. 16:3. Because the eating of the *matzot* was ordained and presumably carried out before the 10th plague struck (v. 8), the present rationale must be a reinterpretation of a pre-existing practice.

35. The silver and gold given (not lent) by the Egyptians constituted a protest against the policies of the royal tyrant. They demonstrated a renewal of public conscience. Similar gifts were given to the Jews leaving Babylonia to return to Judea (Ezra 1:4). Had the Israelites left Egypt with nothing after so many years of suffering, the hatred in their hearts toward the Egyptians would have been never ending. The

Torah wanted the Egyptian people to send them off with gifts, so that it would be easier for the Israelites to fulfill the *mitzvah* “you shall not abhor an Egyptian” (Deut. 23:8). (This comment is by Benno Jacob, who was born and grew up in Germany and had to escape to England after the Nazis came to power. He understood that the purpose of the commandment was to cleanse our memory of bitterness and hatred.)

of silver and gold, and clothing.³⁶ And the LORD had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians.

³⁷The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children. ³⁸Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

THE EXODUS (vv. 37–42)

37. Raamses This city served as the assembly point for the departing Israelites. See Comment to 1:11.

Succoth A one day's journey from the royal palace at Raamses. This probably was the site known as Tjeku in Egyptian, the capital of the eighth province of Lower Egypt in the eastern part of the delta. The region is known to have served as pasture land for Semitic tribes and was the Egyptian gateway to and from Asia.

Six hundred thousand Women, children, and the elderly are not included. This number of men on foot would mean there was a total Israelite population of more than two million. The eastern part of the Nile delta or the peninsula of Sinai could not sustain such a vast population with water and food, not to mention the logistics involved in moving two million people together with their

וַיְהִי־הָיָה נָתַן אֶת־חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם
וַיִּשְׁאַלֹּם וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם: פ
וַיִּסְעוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעַמְסֵס סֹכֶתָה
בְּשֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת אֲלָף רַגְלֵי הַגְּבָרִים לְבַד
מִטָּף: ³⁸ וְגַם־עָרַב רַב עָלָה אִתָּם וְצֹאן
וּבָקָר מְקֻנָּה כְּבֵד מְאֹד: ³⁹ וַיֵּאָפוּ אֶת־
הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עִגְתַּי מִצֹּת
כִּי לֹא חֲמֵץ כִּי־גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יִכְלוּ
לְהַתְמַהֲמְהָ וְגַם־צִדְדָה לֹא־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:

cattle and herds across the Sea of Reeds with the Egyptian chariots in hot pursuit. In response to these problems, it has been suggested that the Hebrew word *elef*, usually rendered “thousand,” here means “clan” or that it signifies a small military unit—the number of fighting men levied from each tribe. Another theory construes the total number as envisaging the Israelite population at the close of the “Exodus era,” which culminated with the completion of the Temple by King Solomon: 600,000 adult males would be a realistic statistic for that period.

38. a mixed multitude Varied groups of forced laborers seem to have taken advantage of the confused situation and fled the country with the Israelites. Note that the Hebrew word translated as “mixed multitude” (*eirev*) is from the same root (ערב) as the plague in 8:17, suggesting the rabbinic tradition that these people were a major source of the troubles in the desert.

This practice of the Egyptians sending the Israelites off with gifts of gold and jewels anticipates the law (Deut. 15:13) that one who frees a slave must not send him or her away empty handed. According to the Midrash, there were three kinds of people among the Egyptians. One third wanted to keep the Israelites as slaves. They died in the plagues. A second group supported Israel's bid for liberation and rose in revolt against Pharaoh's stubborn policies. These were the Egyptians who gave Israel gold, silver, and jewels as they prepared to leave. Their “lending” these gifts to the Israelites was part of the public nature of

the Exodus. The Israelites did not sneak out furtively under cover of darkness. A third group of Egyptians celebrated the *Pesah* with Israel and then left with them, as we read (v. 38), “a mixed multitude went up with them” (Exod. R. 18:8).

39. nor had they prepared They had two weeks to prepare for the Exodus. Does this suggest a certain lack of confidence that God would in fact redeem them? Or does it reflect the slaves' mentality of living day to day and not planning for the future? Perhaps it testifies to their faith, willing to march into the desert without having prepared food in advance.

⁴⁰The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years; ⁴¹at the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day, all the ranks of the LORD departed from the land of Egypt. ⁴²That was for the LORD a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is the LORD's, one of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages.

⁴³The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it. ⁴⁴But any slave a man has bought may eat of it once he has been circumcised. ⁴⁵No bound or hired laborer shall eat of it. ⁴⁶It shall be eaten in one house: you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house; nor shall you

וּמוֹשֶׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם
שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: ⁴¹ וַיְהִי
מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה
וַיְהִי בַעֲצֻם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יֵצְאוּ כָּל-צְבָאוֹת
יְהוָה מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: ⁴² לַיִל שְׁמֵרִים הוּא
לַיהוָה לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא-
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה לַיהוָה שְׁמֵרִים לְכָל-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדוֹרֹתָם: פ

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת
חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח כָּל-בֶּן-נֶכֶר לֹא-יֹאכַל בוֹ:
וְכָל-עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְּנַת-בֵּטֶס וּמִלֶּתָה אִתּוֹ
אִזּוֹ יֹאכַל בוֹ: ⁴⁵ תוֹשֵׁב וְשָׂכִיר לֹא-יֹאכַל-
בוֹ: ⁴⁶ בְּבַיִת אֶחָד יֹאכַל לֹא-תוֹצִיאַ

40–41. This historical summation does not accord precisely with the 400 years of Egyptian oppression predicted in Gen. 15:13. Perhaps that round number and its division into neatly symmetrical periods of time—as explained by some of the rabbis and medieval commentators—are intended to be rhetorical rather than literal; i.e., they underline the biblical concept of history as the fulfillment of God's design. In the worldview of the Bible, history is not a series of disconnected and haphazard incidents.

42. The final night in Egypt, the night of redemption, is described as one of vigil for both God and the Israelites.

EXCLUSIONARY REGULATIONS (vv. 43–49)

This final section has its own title: "The Law of the Passover Offering." It largely defines who is ineligible to celebrate the festival. The primary emphasis is on the practice of circumcision. As the physical token of God's covenant and a symbol of commitment to a life lived in the full awareness of that covenant, it is the indispensable prerequisite for males who wish to participate in the paschal offering. This requirement was forcefully expressed in 4:24–26, when Moses set out to return to Egypt to commence his mission

of liberation, and it is stressed once again at the moment of the successful fulfillment of that mission.

43. foreigner The Hebrew term *ben nekhar* refers to a non-Israelite who resides in the land temporarily, usually for purposes of commerce. He does not profess the religion of Israel and does not identify with the community's historical experiences. He is, therefore, exempted from the religious obligations and restrictions imposed on Israelites.

44. Once the privately owned slave is circumcised (per the law of Gen. 17:12–13) he is treated as a member of the family and may participate fully in the paschal offering. The link between Passover and circumcision is also found in Josh. 5, a companion to this passage designated as the *haftarah* for the first day of *Pesah*.

45. bound or hired laborer These are two categories of non-Israelite wage earners who do not have the status of members of a household.

46. in one house This logically connects with the preceding verses, which stress that only those included within a household may participate. None may leave the house because every Israelite must be accounted for and prepared when the signal is given to depart.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

12:43. No foreigner shall eat of it This rule applied only to the sacrifice of the paschal lamb in biblical times. It does not apply to non-Jewish guests at a *Seider* meal in our time.

break a bone of it. ⁴⁷The whole community of Israel shall offer it. ⁴⁸If a stranger who dwells with you would offer the passover to the LORD, all his males must be circumcised; then he shall be admitted to offer it; he shall then be as a citizen of the country. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. ⁴⁹There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you.

⁵⁰And all the Israelites did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

⁵¹That very day the LORD freed the Israelites from the land of Egypt, troop by troop.

מִן־הַבֵּית מִן־הַבֶּשֶׂר הוֹצֵה וְעֶצֶם לֹא תִשְׁבְּרוּ־בּוֹ: ⁴⁷ כָּל־עַדְתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ: ⁴⁸ וְכִי־יִגְוֹר אֶתְךָ גֵר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה הַמּוֹל לוֹ כָּל־זָכָר וְאִזּוֹ יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ וְהָיָה בְּאֶרֶץ הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עַרְל לֹא־יֵאָכֵל בּוֹ: ⁴⁹ תּוֹרָה אַחַת יְהִי לְאִזְרָח וְלִגֵּר הֹגֵר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

⁵⁰ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן בֶּן עָשׂוֹ: ס
⁵¹ וַיְהִי בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־שְׂבִיעֵי צְבָאתָם: פ

break a bone Presumably, to suck out the marrow.

48–49. These instructions relate to the situation envisaged above in verse 25. Strangers in ancient Israel enjoyed numerous rights and privileges, such as the benefits of *Shabbat* rest, the protection afforded by the cities of refuge, and access to a share of certain tithes and to the produce of the sabbatical year. They could even offer sacrifices if they so wished and participate in religious festivals. They were obligated to refrain from certain actions that could undermine the social, moral, and spiritual well-being of the dominant society—such as immorality, idolatry, blasphemy, and the consumption of blood. They were not

required to celebrate *Pesah*; but if they desired to do so, and thus identify themselves and their families with the national experience of Israel, the men first had to undergo the rite of circumcision. Having done so, no discrimination between them and citizens was allowed. An uncircumcised Israelite was also excluded from participation.

50. This refers to the eating of the paschal offering.

51. This verse resumes the narrative of verses 37–41. It is connected to the next chapter by the traditional scribal division of the Torah, to indicate that the subsequent law of the firstborn came into effect on the very day of the Exodus.

48. The person of non-Jewish origin who chooses to join the Jewish people, the *ger*, is welcome to celebrate *Pesah* even though his or her ancestors were not literally slaves in Egypt and did not leave with Moses, even as immigrants to the United States sing, “Land where my fathers died.”

49. This may be taken as a major statement of the innate worth of all human beings and their right to equal treatment under the law.

Every spring at the *Pesah Seider*, every week

when we pause on *Shabbat* to demonstrate that we are free people and not slaves (praising *Shabbat* in the *Kiddush* as “a reminder of our liberation from Egypt”), indeed every day, the Jew is to recall that Jewish history began with God’s intervening on behalf of an enslaved people, leading them to freedom, and giving them the Torah. That memory is to be personal, not a fact of ancient history. (Exod. 13:8: “It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.”)

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

12:49. one law The non-Jew, though not subject to all the duties and privileges of Jewish law, must nevertheless be treated fairly and justly in all business and legal dealings, and Jews are commanded to care for all who are sick or poor, including non-Jews. (BT Git. 61a).

13 The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying, ²“Consecrate to Me every first-born; man and beast, the first issue of every womb among the Israelites is Mine.”

³And Moses said to the people,

“Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how the LORD freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴You go free on

יג וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ²קִדְּשׁ־לִי כָל־בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר כָּל־רֶחֶם בְּבִנְי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאָדָם וּבַבְּהֵמָה לִי הוּא: ³וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם זְכוֹר אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֹתֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים כִּי בְחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם מִזֶּה וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חֻמֵץ: ⁴הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ

COMMEMORATIVE RITUALS (13:1–16)

This section continues the process of connecting institutions of the present with the Exodus experience of the past. The revitalized ancient rituals, charged with new historical meaning, serve to perpetuate the memory of those events by making them living realities for subsequent generations. In this section, the key to linking historical and natural events is the coincidence that the liberation from Egypt occurred in the spring (v. 4), the season of nature’s rebirth. It is the period of the new barley harvest and the time when animals begin their reproductive cycle.

CONSECRATION OF THE FIRSTBORN (vv. 1–2)

1. The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying This simple formula always introduces a specific instruction given to Moses personally, a communication not relayed to the people. It usually requires that he initiate some action—in this instance, consecrating the firstborn, which is juxtaposed to the slaying of the firstborn Egyptians.

2. In many ancient pagan cultures it was believed that the first fruits of the soil, and the first offspring of animals and humans, were endowed by nature with intrinsic holiness. The instruction that Moses consecrate the firstborn may be an aggressive attack against such notions. The firstborn belongs to God solely by reason of His divine will decreed at the time of the Exodus and not because of any inherent sanctity.

Consecrate to Me This instruction usually involves a rite of purification as well as an induction ceremony. The former requires bathing, laundering of clothes, and abstention from ritual defilement on the part of the initiate (see

19:10,14). The latter entails an investiture performed by a superior (see Lev. 8:6ff.).

beast Verse 12 below will restrict the requirement to the male animal, which would more likely be expendable, because animal breeding requires many females and few males. (Nothing is stated here concerning the law of the first fruits of the soil, because they cannot be connected with the events of the 10th plague and the Exodus, but only with the conquest and settlement of the Land. They are treated in later texts.)

first issue of every womb Some believe that this alludes to a pre-Israelite requirement that the firstborn child be offered as a sacrifice. It is clear from this text, however, that the notion is rejected by the Torah (see v. 13).

LAWS OF MATZOT AND T’FILLIN (vv. 3–10)

Israel’s liberation from Egypt is to be an event forever imprinted on its memory, individually and collectively. A set of symbols is created to actualize the experiences.

3. Remember See Comment to 2:24.

this day The 15th of the first month.

house of bondage Literally, “house of slaves.” This designation for Egypt, frequent in Deuteronomy, may derive from the Egyptian practice of settling the labor gangs in walled workmen’s villages close to the site of the project for which they were conscripted. To the Israelites, such a village may have appeared to be a gigantic “slave house.”

no leavened bread Denying oneself all benefit from anything containing leaven during *Pesah* is one way of fulfilling the commandment to “remember.”

this day, in the month of Abib. ⁵So, when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall observe in this month the following practice:

⁶“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the LORD. ⁷Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in all your territory. ⁸And you shall explain to your son on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I went free from Egypt.’

⁹“And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead—in order that the Teaching of the LORD may be in your mouth—that with a mighty hand the LORD freed you from Egypt. ¹⁰You shall keep this institution at its set time from year to year.

5. flowing with milk and honey See Comment to Exod. 3:8.

6. Another aid to memory, this one a positive action: the eating of *matzot*.

seventh day According to rabbinic tradition, it was on the seventh day after the Exodus that the pursuing Egyptians drowned in the Sea of Reeds. Nevertheless, the emphasis here—before the Exodus—on the special religious character of that day disconnects it from any celebration of Egypt’s defeat.

8. you shall explain The word translated “you shall explain” (*v’higgadta*, literally, “you shall tell”) is the source of the *Haggadah*, the name of the service containing rituals and readings for the

הָאֲבִיבִים: ⁵וְהָיָה כִּי־יְבִיאֲכֶם יְהוָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֵיךָ לָתֵת לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ וְעַבְדַּתְּ אֶת־הָעַבְדָּה הַזֹּאת בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה:

⁶שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תֹּאכַל מַצֹּת וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי חַג לַיהוָה: ⁷מִצּוֹת יֹאכַל אֶת־שִׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חֶמֶץ וְלֹא־יֵרָאֶה לְךָ שָׂאֵר בְּכָל־גְּבֻלְךָ: ⁸וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:

⁹וְהָיָה לְךָ לְאוֹת עַל־יָדְךָ וּלְזָכְרוֹן בֵּין עֵינֶיךָ לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרָה תּוֹרַת יְהוָה בְּפִיךָ כִּי בְיַד חֲזָקָה הוֹצֵאֲךָ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם: ¹⁰וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־הַחֻקָּה הַזֹּאת לְמוֹעֵד מִיָּמִים יְמִימָה: ט

Pesah night ceremonials. Parents must take the initiative in instructing their children.

9. In rabbinic tradition, this verse has been interpreted as instituting the *ifillin* (commonly known as “phylacteries” in English), worn during weekday morning prayers (see v. 16).

your hand Rabbinic tradition understands this as the left arm and hand.

forehead Literally, “between your eyes.” The Hebrew, which has always been interpreted to refer to the forehead, is confirmed by Deut. 14:1.

Teaching of the LORD Hebrew: *torat YHVH*. This phrase first appears here. It cannot possibly refer to the canonized Torah, but it does presuppose a text that can be memorized and recited.

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

13:8. you shall explain to your son The Hebrew word *ben* here is understood as a female as well as a male child. If no children are present, adults are obligated to ask the questions and recount the Exodus from Egypt each *Seider* night. It is especially praiseworthy to expound at length on the Exodus through discussion, debate, and additional readings.

13:9. as a sign See Comment on Deut. 6:8.

13:10. at its set time Because *Pesah* must be celebrated in the spring, the lunar cycle that governs the Jewish calendar had to be adapted to the solar seasons. Therefore, the Jewish calendar adds an extra month before *Pesah* during 7 designated years of a 19-year cycle to ensure that *Pesah* remains a spring holiday, as required in Exod. 13:4 and Deut. 16:1.

¹¹“And when the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and has given it to you, ¹²you shall set apart for the LORD every first issue of the womb: every male firstling that your cattle drop shall be the LORD’s. ¹³But every firstling ass you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. And you must redeem every first-born male among your children. ¹⁴And when, in time to come, your son asks you, saying, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘It was with a mighty hand that the LORD brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage. ¹⁵When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, the first-born of both man and beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every first male issue of the womb, but redeem every first-born among my sons.’

¹⁶“And so it shall be as a sign upon your hand

REDEMPTION OF THE FIRSTBORN (vv. 11–16)

Verse 2 ordains the immediate consecration of the firstborn. This section deals with the treatment of the firstborn after settlement in the Promised Land. The animal firstling is to retain its status; it belongs to God. The priestly status of the human firstborn, however, is to be revoked, their functions taken over by the tribe of Levi. Hence, the sanctity of the firstborn sons is to be removed by the process of “redemption,” which explains why this section does not immediately follow verse 2.

12. issue of the womb A firstborn by cesarean section is thus exempt from the redemption requirement.

13. firstling ass This is the only ritually impure animal that needs to be redeemed, in this case by giving a sheep to the priest as a replace-

11 וְהָיָה כִּי-יְבִיאֲךָ יְהוָה אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַפְּנִיעַנִי
כַּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ וּלְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ וַיִּתְּנֶנָּה לְךָ:
12 וְהֶעֱבַרְתָּ כָּל-פֶּטֶר-רֶחֶם לַיהוָה וְכָל-
פֶּטֶר | שֹׁגֵר בְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה לְךָ הַזִּכְרִים
לַיהוָה: 13 וְכָל-פֶּטֶר חֲמֹר תִּפְדֶּה בְּשֵׂה
וְאִם-לֹא תִפְדֶּה וְעִרְפָּתוֹ וְכָל בְּכוֹר אֲדָם
מִפְטִיר בְּבִנְיָהּ תִּפְדֶּה: 14 וְהָיָה כִּי-יִשְׁאַלְךָ בִּנְךָ
מִחוּר לֵאמֹר מַה-זֹּאת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו בְּחֹזֶק
יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:
15 וַיְהִי כִּי-הִקְשָׁה פְרַעֲהוֹ לְשַׁלְּחֵנוּ וַיַּהַרְג
יְהוָה כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבְּכוֹר אֲדָם
וְעַד-בְּכוֹר בְּהֵמָה עַל-פֶּן אֲנִי זָבַח לַיהוָה
כָּל-פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם הַזִּכְרִים וְכָל-בְּכוֹר בְּנֵי
אֲפֻדָּה:
16 וְהָיָה לְאוֹת עַל-יְדֹכָהּ * וּלְטוֹטְפֹת בֵּין

v. 16. יתיר ה'

ment. The ass was the standard means of transport and a beast of burden. As Ibn Ezra observes, it was most likely the only ritually impure domestic animal possessed by the Israelites in Egypt.

break its neck According to rabbinic tradition, the neck was broken by a blow from behind with a hatchet. This exceptional form of slaughter was used to avoid the appearance of performing the ritual slaughter of an unclean animal.

redeem every first-born male The method of redemption is not given, presupposing a familiar, established practice. See Num. 18:16.

14. this The ceremony of redemption.

15. The “mighty hand” in the previous verse is here explained as referring to the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn.

16. See Comments to verse 9. (*Totafot* are identified as a pendant or headband, interpreted by later Jewish tradition as phylacteries.)

CHAPTER 13

16. sign upon your hand . . . symbol on your

forehead It is striking that a people so recently released from bondage in Egypt should respond to their freedom not by wanting to live

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

13:13. *redeem every first-born male* See Comment on Num. 3:13.

and as a symbol on your forehead that with a mighty hand the LORD freed us from Egypt.”

עֵינֶיךָ בִּי בְּחֹזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְהוָה מִמִּצְרַיִם: ט

without obligations but by willingly binding themselves to the God who freed them (in the symbolism of *t'fillin*).

Why are *t'fillin* placed on the left arm, which generally is the weaker arm? Because our arm was weak in Egypt and it was only by God's mighty hand that we were rescued (*K'li Yakar*). The word *totafot* ("symbol") is plural. The *t'fillin* worn on the arm has a single receptacle for the scriptural verses placed therein, whereas the *t'fillin* worn on the forehead is di-

vided into four. This has prompted the comment that, although Jews may be divided in their beliefs and opinions, with no authority to compel their belief, they should be united in action. The Rabbinic imagination envisioned God as also wearing *t'fillin*. What is written inside God's *t'fillin*? A statement of God's love and admiration for the Jewish people, in words taken from 1 Chron. 17:21, "Who is like My people Israel!" (BT Ber. 6a).

HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

13:16. *as a sign* See Comment on Deut. 6:8.

הַפְטָרַת בֵּא

HAFTARAH FOR BO

JEREMIAH 46:13–28

This *haftarah* is part of a series of prophecies against Egypt that begin with Jer. 46:2. They constitute the first group of Jeremiah's pronouncements against foreign nations, collected in chapters 46–51. The anti-Egyptian oracles in the *haftarah* (46:13–26), varying in content and in style, are followed by two positive oracles about Israel in verses 27–28. Jeremiah's doom oracles against Egypt are given a historical setting in verses 13 and 25–26, where King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon is identified as the avenger. The *parashah* also presents a polarity of Egyptian doom and Israelite salvation.

Following the taunting proclamations of the Egyptian call to arms and the ensuing flight and fear (46:14–16), the assertive voice of the Lord, proclaiming doom and desolation, provides a counterpoint. This contrast is underscored by the mocking epithet for “Pharaoh king of Egypt: / ‘Braggart who let the hour go by’” (v. 17). In contradistinction, God “the King, / Whose name is LORD of Hosts” swears by His own being that the words of doom “shall . . . come to pass” (v. 18). The aura of inevitability is reinforced by the repeated use of the Hebrew particle *ki*, with the sense of “for” and “surely” (vv. 14–15, 18–19, 21–23).

In these oracles, “The LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel” is the universal Lord of history, inflicting punishment “on Egypt, her gods, and her kings”

(v. 25). Total destruction will not be the outcome, however, because God's final word to the Egyptians prophesies their eventual restoration (v. 26).

The concluding oracles in verses 27 and 28 of the *haftarah* breathe another spirit. The prophet repeatedly exhorts the Israelites to overcome fear and loss though assurances that the Lord will deliver them from their land of captivity (v. 27). They will receive judgment in proper measure, without unilateral doom (v. 28). One senses here a consolation for the dismayed. The promise of calm and quiet is not yet a reality.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH* TO THE *PARASHAH*

The theme of Israelite servitude in Egypt in the *parashah* is counterpoised with a promise of Egypt's destruction in the *haftarah* (vv. 14–24). The plague of locusts described in the *parashah* (Exod. 10:3–20) is echoed in Jeremiah's prophecy as a metaphor for the overwhelmingly numerous armies that will descend on Egypt in its hour of doom (Jer. 46:23). Nebuchadrezzar's “coming” in judgment against Pharaoh (v. 13) responds to Moses' ancient “coming” in supplication before Pharaoh (Exod. 10:1). God will wreak judgment on the gods of Egypt (Jer. 46:25), as He declared long ago (“I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt,” Exod. 12:12).

46 ¹³The word which the LORD spoke to the prophet Jeremiah about the coming of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon to attack the land of Egypt:

מו ¹³הַדְּבַר אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-
יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא לְבוֹא נְבוּכַדְרֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ
בָּבֶל לְהַפֹּת אֶת-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

¹⁴Declare in Egypt, proclaim in Migdol,

¹⁴הַגִּידוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהִשְׁמִיעוּ בְּמִגְדוֹל

Proclaim in Noph and Tahpanhes!
 Say: Take your posts and stand ready,
 For the sword has devoured all around you!
 15Why are your stalwarts swept away?
 They did not stand firm,
 For the LORD thrust them down;
 16He made many stumble,
 They fell over one another.

They said:
 “Up! Let us return to our people,
 To the land of our birth,
 Because of the deadly sword.”
 17There they called Pharaoh king of Egypt:
 “Braggart who let the hour go by.”

18As I live—declares the King,
 Whose name is LORD of Hosts—
 As surely as Tabor is among the mountains
 And Carmel is by the sea,
 So shall this come to pass.
 19Equip yourself for exile,
 Fair Egypt, you who dwell secure!
 For Noph shall become a waste,
 Desolate, without inhabitants.
 20Egypt is a handsome heifer—

וְהִשְׁמִיעוּ בְנֵי וְבִתֵּי חֲפְנָחַס
 אָמְרוּ הַתִּיצֵב וְהִכֵּן לָךְ
 כִּי־אֶכְלָה חָרֵב סְבִיבֶיךָ:
 מִדּוּעַ נִסְחַף אַבְיָרֶיךָ
 לֹא עָמְדוּ
 כִּי יְהוָה הִדְּפוֹ:
 הִרְבָּה בּוֹשֵׁל
 גַּם־נָפְלוּ אִישׁ אֶל־רֵעֵהוּ

וַיֹּאמְרוּ
 קוּמָה | וְנִשְׁבָּה אֶל־עַמֵּנוּ
 וְאֶל־אָרֶץ מוֹלְדֹתֵנוּ
 מִפְּנֵי חָרֵב הַיּוֹנָה:
 17 קָרְאוּ שֵׁם פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם
 שָׂאוֹן הַעֲבִיר הַמוֹעֵד:

חַי־אֲנִי נְאֻם־הַמֶּלֶךְ
 יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ
 כִּי כְתוּב בְּהָרִים
 וּכְכַרְמֵל בָּיִם
 יָבוֹא:
 19 כְּלִי גוֹלָה עֲשֵׂי לָךְ
 יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּתִמְצָרִים
 כִּי־נָחַף לְשִׁמָּה תִהְיֶה
 וְנִצְתָה מֵאִין יוֹשֵׁב:
 20 עֲגֹלָה יִפְהֶ־פִיָּה מִצְרַיִם

Jeremiah 46:14. in Migdol . . . Noph and Tahpanhes The Egyptian place-names have been hebraized. Migdol is a Semitic name meaning “Tower.” It was used for several frontier towns in the eastern delta. Noph is a corruption of Moph (see Hos. 9:6) or Memphis (Saqqara, in the lower Nile). Tahpanhes is derived from two words, meaning “fortress of the Nubian” (Tel Daphne).
16. Up! Let us return to our people This refers either to the mercenaries or to the foreign traders who flee from Egypt.
17. Braggart who let the hour go by The Hebrew phrase is difficult. The word translated “braggart” (*sha-on*, literally “uproar, tumult”) is

understood as “loudmouth.” The Targum understands the term more literally, referring to Pharaoh as one who made a big tumult. The noun can also mean “desolation” or “destruction.” On this basis, Radak dubbed Nebuchadrezzar “king of Destruction.”
18. As surely as Tabor . . . / So shall this come to pass The simile is puzzling. As rendered here, the analogy suggests that as surely as Tabor is among the mountains the event will come to pass (Rashi and Radak). Alternatively, the verb (“will come”) refers to the advent of Nebuchadrezzar (i.e., “he shall come”).
20. Egypt is a handsome heifer This meta-

A gadfly from the north is coming, coming!

²¹The mercenaries, too, in her midst

Are like stall-fed calves;

They too shall turn tail,

Flee as one, and make no stand.

Their day of disaster is upon them,

The hour of their doom.

²²She shall rustle away like a snake

As they come marching in force;

They shall come against her with axes,

Like hewers of wood.

²³They shall cut down her forest

—declares the LORD—

Though it cannot be measured;

For they are more numerous than locusts,

And cannot be counted.

²⁴Fair Egypt shall be shamed,

Handed over to the people of the north.

²⁵The LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, has said: I will inflict punishment on Amon of No and on Pharaoh—on Egypt, her gods, and her kings—on Pharaoh and all who rely on him. ²⁶I will deliver them into the hands of those who seek to kill them, into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and into the hands of his subjects. But afterward she shall be inhabited again as in former days, declares the LORD.

phor may have been chosen to allude to the Egyptian bull god, Apis.

from the north The reference to an enemy from the north here and in verse 24 is unspecified. Elsewhere in Jeremiah the designation of an enemy from the northland is similarly vague (see 3:18, 6:22, 10:22, 16:15). Only in 605 B.C.E. does the prophet identify this enemy with Babylon (Jer. 25:9).

25. inflict punishment Hebrew: *poked*. This summary statement is linked to “their day of disaster” (*et p’kudatam*) in verse 21. The verb *poked* has the sense of inflicting punishment for wrongdoing. It is used that way in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:5) and in the list of divine attributes (Exod.

קִרְץ מִצְפּוֹן בָּא בָּא :

²¹ גַּם־שׁוֹכְרֵיהָ בְקִרְבָּהּ

בְּעֵגְלֵי מִרְבֵּק

כִּי־גַם־הִמָּה הִפְנוּ

נִסּוּ יַחְדָּיו לֹא עָמְדוּ

כִּי יוֹם אִידָם בָּא עֲלֵיהֶם

עַת פְּקֻדָּתָם :

²² קוֹלָהּ כַּנְחֹשׁ יִלְךְ

כִּי־בַחִיל יֵלְכוּ

וּבְקִרְדָּמוֹת בָּאוּ לָהּ

כַּחֲטָבֵי עֵצִים :

²³ בָּרְתוּ יַעֲרֶהּ

נְאֻם־יְהוָה

כִּי לֹא יִחְקַר

כִּי רַבּוּ מֵאַרְבֵּה

וְאִין לָהֶם מִסְפָּר :

²⁴ הַבְּיִשָּׁה בֵּת־מִצְרַיִם

נִתְּנָה בְיַד עַם־צָפוֹן :

²⁵ אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנְּגִי

פּוֹקֵד אֶל־אֲמוֹן מִזָּא וְעַל־פְּרַעֲה וְעַל־

מִצְרַיִם וְעַל־אֱלֹהֵיהֶּ וְעַל־מַלְכֵיהֶּ וְעַל־

פְּרַעֲה וְעַל הַבְּטָחִים בּוֹ : ²⁶ וְנִתְּנִים בְּיַד

מִבְּקָשֵׁי נַפְשָׁם וּבְיַד נְבוּכַדְרֶאֱצַּר מֶלֶךְ־

בָּבֶל וּבְיַד־עַבְדָּיו וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן תִּשְׁכַּן כִּימֵי־

קִדְם נְאֻם־יְהוָה : ט

34:7). Significantly, the phrase “I will not leave you unpunished” (*nakkei lo anakkeka*) in the last verse of the *haftarah* echoes the phrase in Exod. 34:7 which declares that God “does not remit all punishment” (*nakkei lo y’nakkeh*).

Amon Amon, or Amon Re, was the imperial god of Egypt. The chief center of his worship was the Temple of Karnak in Thebes.

No Thebes; *niwt* (The City) in Egyptian. It was the chief city of Upper Egypt, starting with the Middle Kingdom (2000 B.C.E.). Jeremiah lived during the time when the center of government shifted from Thebes to Sais, a city in the upper delta. Even so, Thebes and its Temple of Karnak remained prominent.

27But you,
 Have no fear, My servant Jacob,
 Be not dismayed, O Israel!
 I will deliver you from far away,
 Your folk from their land of captivity;
 And Jacob again shall have calm
 And quiet, with none to trouble him.
 28But you, have no fear,
 My servant Jacob

—declares the LORD—

For I am with you.
 I will make an end of all the nations
 Among which I have banished you,
 But I will not make an end of you!
 I will not leave you unpunished,
 But I will chastise you in measure.

וְאַתָּה²⁷
 אֶל־תִּירָא עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב
 וְאַל־תִּחַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
 כִּי הִנְנִי מוֹשְׁעֶךָ מִרְחֹק
 וְאֶת־זַרְעֶךָ מֵאֶרֶץ שְׁבִיִּים
 וְשָׁב יַעֲקֹב * וְשָׁקֵט
 וְשָׁאֲנָן וְאֵין מַחְרִיד: ס
 אַתָּה אֶל־תִּירָא²⁸
 עַבְדִּי יַעֲקֹב
 נְאֻם־יְהוָה
 כִּי אֶתְּךָ אֲנִי
 כִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה כָּל־הַבְּלֵי־הַגּוֹיִם |
 אֲשֶׁר הִדְחִיתִיךָ שָׁמָּה
 וְאֶתְּךָ לֹא־אֶעֱשֶׂה כָּל־הַ
 וְיִסְרִתִּיךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט
 וְנִקְּהָ לֹא אֲנִקְּךָ: ס

מלא ו' v. 27.

27–28. *Have no fear . . . have no fear* These oracles exhort the people to courage and hope. The same usage is found in prophecies addressed to the nation in exile (Isa. 43:1, 44:2).