

Moses and Aaron Confront Pharaoh (late 1447 BC)

Exodus 5:1–6:9

Moses and Aaron Go to Pharaoh

5:1 And afterward, Moses and Aaron went, and they said to Pharaoh, “Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, ‘Release my people so that they may hold a festival for me in the desert.’”

2 And Pharaoh said, “Who is Yahweh that I should listen to his voice to release Israel? I do not know Yahweh, and also I will not release Israel.”

3 And they said, “The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go *on* a three-day journey into the desert, and let us sacrifice to Yahweh our God, lest he strike us with plague or with sword.”

4 And the king of Egypt said, “Why, Moses and Aaron, do you take the people from their work? Go to your forced labor!”

5 And Pharaoh said, “Look, the people of the land *are* now many, and you want to stop them from their forced labor.”

Pharaoh Responds By Making the Israelites Work Even Harder

6 And on that day Pharaoh commanded the slave drivers over the people and his foremen, saying,

7 “You must no longer give straw to the people to make the bricks like before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves.

8 But the quota of the bricks that they *were* making before you must require of them. You must not reduce from it, because they *are* lazy. Therefore they *are* crying out, saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’

9 Let the work be heavier on the men so that they will do it and not pay attention to words of deception.”

10 And the slave drivers of the people and their foremen went out, and they spoke to the people, saying, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘*I am* not giving you straw.

11 You go, get straw for yourselves from whatever you find because not a thing is being reduced from your work.’”

12 And the people spread out in all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for the straw.

13 And the slave drivers *were* insisting, saying, “Finish your work for each day on its day, as when there was straw.”

14 And the foremen of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s slave drivers had appointed over them, were beaten *by men who were* saying, “Why have you not completed your portion of brickmaking as before, both yesterday and today?”

15 And the foremen of the Israelites came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why do you treat your servants like this?

16 Straw *is* not being given to your servants, but *they are* saying to us, ‘Make bricks!’ and, look, your servants *are* being beaten, but it is the fault of your people.”

17 And he said, “You *are* lazy, lazy! Therefore you *are* saying, ‘Let us go; let us sacrifice to Yahweh.’

18 And now go, work, but straw will not be given to you, and you must give the full quota of bricks.”

The Israelites Berate Moses

19 And the foremen of the Israelites saw they were in trouble with the saying, “You will not reduce from your bricks for each day on its day.”

20 And they met Moses and Aaron, *who were* waiting to meet them when they *were* going out from Pharaoh.

21 And they said to them, “May Yahweh look upon you and judge because you have caused our fragrance to stink in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants *so as* to put a sword into their hand to kill us.”

Moses Complains to Yahweh

22 And Moses returned to Yahweh and said, “Lord, why have you brought trouble to this people? Why ever did you send me?

23 And from the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble to this people, and you have certainly not delivered your people.”

6:1 And Yahweh said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, because with a strong hand he will release them, and with a strong hand he will drive them out from his land.”

2 And God spoke to Moses, and he said to him, “*I am* Yahweh.

3 And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh I was not known to them.

4 And I not only established my covenant with them to give to them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, in which they dwelt as aliens,

5 but also I myself heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom *the* Egyptians *are* making to work, and I remembered my covenant.

6 Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘*I am* Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the forced labor of Egypt, and I will deliver you from their slavery, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great punishments.

7 And I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, and you will know that *I am* Yahweh your God, who brought you out from under the forced labor of Egypt.

8 And I will bring you to the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you *as* a possession. *I am* Yahweh.”

9 And Moses spoke thus to the Israelites, but they did not listen to Moses, because of discouragement and because of hard work.

Israel's First Rebellion (late 1447 BC)

Ezekiel 20:5–9

5 And you must say to them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: "On the day of my choosing Israel I swore to the offspring of the house of Jacob, and I made myself known to them in the land of Egypt, and I swore to them, saying, 'I *am* Yahweh your God.'

6 On that day I swore to them to bring them out from the land of Egypt to *the* land that I had searched out for them, flowing with milk and honey—it *is the most* beautiful of all of the lands.

7 Then I said to them, 'Let each *one* throw away the detestable things of his eyes, and you must not make yourselves unclean with the idols of Egypt! I *am* Yahweh your God.'

8 But they rebelled against me, and they were not willing to listen to me; each *one* did not throw away the detestable things of their eyes; and they did not abandon the idols of Egypt, and I decided to pour out my rage on them, to fully vent my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.

9 "But I acted for the sake of my name to keep it from being profaned before the eyes of the nations among whom they lived, where I made known to them before their eyes, to bring them out from the land of Egypt.

A Renewed Call to Action (early 1446 BC)

Exodus 6:10–30

Yahweh Sends Moses and Aaron Back to Pharaoh

10 And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,
 11 "Go, speak to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and let him release the Israelites from his land."
 12 And Moses spoke before Yahweh, saying, "Look, the Israelites do not listen to me, and how will Pharaoh listen to me, since I *am* a poor speaker?"

Excursus—Genealogy of Moses and Aaron

13 And Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, and he commanded them *to go* to the Israelites and to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to bring the Israelites out from the land of Egypt.
 14 These *are* the heads of their families. The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, *are* Enoch and Pallu, Hezron and Carmi. These *are* the clans of Reuben.
 15 And the sons of Simeon *are* Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jakin and Zohar and Shaul the son of the Canaanitess. These *are* the clans of Simeon.
 16 And these *are* the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogies: Gershon and Kohath and Merari, and the years of the life of Levi *were* one hundred and thirty-seven years.
 17 The sons of Gershon *are* Libni and Shimei according to their clans.
 18 And the sons of Kohath *are* Amram and Izhar and Hebron and Uzziel, and the years of the life of Kohath *were* one hundred and thirty-three years.
 19 And the sons of Merari *are* Mahli and Mushi. These *are* clans of the Levites according to their genealogies.
 20 And Amram took Jochebed his aunt for himself as a wife, and she bore for him Aaron and Moses, and the years of the life of Amram *were* one hundred and thirty-seven years.
 21 And the sons of Izhar *are* Korah and Nepheg and Zikri.
 22 And the sons of Uzziel *are* Mishael and Elzaphan and Sithri.
 23 And Aaron took Elisheba the daughter of Amminadab, the sister of Nahshon, for himself as a wife, and she bore for him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.
 24 And the sons of Korah *are* Assir and Elkanah and Abiasaph. These *are* the clans of the Korahites.
 25 And Eleazar the son of Aaron took for himself *one* from the daughters of Putiel as a wife, and she bore for him Phinehas. These *are* the heads of the families of the Levites according to their clans.
 26 *It was* that Aaron and Moses to whom Yahweh said, "Bring the Israelites out from the land of Egypt according to their divisions."
 27 They *were* those who spoke to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, in order to bring the Israelites out from Egypt. *It was* that Moses and Aaron.

Recapitulation of Command to Return

28 And so it was on a certain day Yahweh spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.
 29 And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, "I *am* Yahweh. Speak to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, all that I *am* speaking to you."
 30 And Moses said before Yahweh, "Look, I *am* a poor speaker. And how will Pharaoh listen to me?"

Moses' and Aaron's Second Confrontation With Pharaoh (early 1446 BC)

Exodus 7:1–13

- 1 And Yahweh said to Moses, “See, I have made you *as* a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet.
 2 You will speak all that I will command you, and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh, and he will release the Israelites from his land.
 3 And I myself will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and I will make my signs and my wonders numerous in the land of Egypt.
 4 And Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will put my hand into Egypt and bring out my divisions, my people, the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with great punishments.
 5 And *the* Egyptians will know that I *am* Yahweh when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring the Israelites out from their midst.”
 6 And Moses and Aaron did *it*; as Yahweh commanded them, so they did.
 7 (And Moses *was* eighty years old, and Aaron *was* eighty-three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh.)
 8 And Yahweh said to Moses and to Aaron, saying,
 9 “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Do a wonder for yourselves,’ you will say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’”
 10 And Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and they did so, as Yahweh had commanded. And Aaron threw his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake.
 11 And Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did likewise with their secret arts. [[2 Tim 3:8](#)]
 12 Each threw down his staff, and they became snakes, and Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs.
 13 And Pharaoh’s heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, as Yahweh had said.

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Chronological Notes

- 1) The rebellion of Israel mentioned in Ezekiel 20:5–9¹ is presented here as part of the Exodus narrative. That this rebellion occurred in Egypt itself, prior to the crossing of the Red Sea, is seen in v. 8 where God was determined to “vent my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt” (Ezek 20:8).² In light of this, it seems likely that the plagues were not meant for Pharaoh and the Egyptians alone—indeed, there is no indication that Goshen was spared from the first three plagues. It is only in the fourth plague that a distinction was made between the Israelites and the Egyptians (Exod 8:22–23). This distinction, although not explicitly referenced in the following narrative (it’s missing in the sixth and eighth plagues), seems to have continued throughout the remaining plagues.
- 2) The Pharaoh of the Exodus.³
 - A) When Moses returned to Egypt, he and Aaron spoke to the new king, Amenhotep II. This powerful and militaristic monarch conducted a major campaign in Canaan in his third year (ca. 1450) and another in his seventh (ca. 1446). His seventh year coincides with the traditional date of the exodus, 1446, and one cannot help but wonder if the decimation of Pharaoh’s army at the Sea of Reeds might not have followed this second campaign, and had such a demoralizing impact as to discourage further immediate adventurism, especially to the north.
 - B) Our identification of Amenhotep II as the pharaoh of the exodus is supported by two other considerations. First, although most of the kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty made their principal residence at Thebes, far to the south of the Israelites in the Delta, Amenhotep was at home in Memphis and apparently reigned from there much of the time. This placed him in close proximity to the land of Goshen and made him readily accessible to Moses and Aaron. Second, the best understanding suggests that Amenhotep’s power did not pass to his eldest son but rather to Thutmose IV, a younger son. This is at least implied in the so-called dream stela found at the base of the Great Sphinx near Memphis. This text, which records a dream

¹ Other references that mention Israel’s idolatry while in Egypt include: Leviticus 17:7; Ezekiel 23:3, 8, 19; Joshua 24:14.

² Keil & Delitzsch comment: “It is true that there is nothing expressly stated in the Pentateuch as to the refusal of the Israelites to obey the command of God, or their unwillingness to give up idolatry in Egypt; but it may be inferred from the statements contained in Ex. 6:9 and 12...” (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, “Ezekiel Daniel,” *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 154). See also Steven Tuell’s comments on Ezekiel 20:5–9 (Steven Tuell, “Ezekiel,” *UBCS*, 128).

³ Sourced from Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, Second Edition, (Baker Publishing, 2008), 80.

in which Thutmose IV was promised that he would one day be king, suggests, as one historian says, that his reign came about “through an unforeseen turn of fate, such as the premature death of an elder brother.” It is impossible to prove, but one cannot help but speculate as to whether this premature death was not caused by the judgment of Yahweh, who in the tenth plague struck dead all the firstborn of Egypt, who were unprotected by the blood of the Passover, “from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon” (Exod 12:29).

Textual Notes

1) Genealogy of Moses.

