

Exodus End of Chapter 4 + Chapter 5

27. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵךְ לִקְרַאת מֹשֶׁה הַמִּדְבָּרָה וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁקֵלּוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
The LORD said to Aaron, "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness." He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him.	YHWH said to Aharon: Go to meet Moshe in the wilderness! He went, he encountered him at the mountain of God and he kissed him.	And YHWH said to Aaron, "Go toward Moses, to the wilderness." And he went, and he met him in the Mountain of God, and he kissed him.	And the LORD said to Aaron, "Go to the wilderness to meet Moses." And he went and encountered him on the mountain of God and he kissed him.

Alter

And the LORD said to Aaron. We return to the welcome sphere of a God Who speaks, and directs men to act through speech. After the reunion of the brothers, they will promptly implement God's instructions as Moses imparts the words to Aaron and Aaron then speaks the words to the people.

28. וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁלְחָהּ וְאֵת כָּל־הַאֲתֹת אֲשֶׁר צִוְּהוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Moses told Aaron about all the things that the LORD had committed to him and all the signs about which He had instructed him.	And Moshe told Aharon all YHWH'S words with which he had sent him and all the signs with which he had charged him.	And Moses told Aaron all YHWH's words that He had sent him and all the signs that He had commanded him.	And Moses told Aaron all the LORD's words with which He sent him and all the signs with which He charged him.

29. וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֵּאסְפוּ אֶת-כָּל-זְקֵנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites.	Moshe and Aharon went; they gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel,	And Moses went, and Aaron, and they gathered all the elders of the children of Israel,	And Moses, and Aaron with him, went, and they gathered the elders of the Israelites.

30. וַיְדַבֵּר אַהֲרֹן אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֵתָת לְעֵינֵי הָעָם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Aaron repeated all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people,	and Aharon spoke all the words which YHWH had spoken to Moshe, and did the signs before the people's eyes.	and Aaron spoke all the words that YHWH had spoken to Moses. And he did the signs before the people's eyes.	And Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and he did the signs before the people's eyes.

31. וַיֵּאֱמֶן הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי-פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת-עֲנָנָם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
and the people were convinced. When they heard that the LORD had taken note of the Israelites and that He had seen their	The people trusted; they hearkened that YHWH had taken account of the Children of Israel, that he had seen their	And the people believed, and they heard that YHWH had taken account of the children of Israel and that He had seen their	And the people believed and heeded, that the LORD had singled out the Israelites and that He had seen their abuse.

plight, they bowed low in homage.	affliction. And they did homage and bowed low.	degradation. And they knelt and bowed.	And they did obeisance and bowed down.
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Fox

The people trusted: For the first time in the Torah, Israel responds to God’s promises in a positive manner, something which will rarely happen again. The vocabulary and attitude form an *inclusio* (a bracket) with the end of the Liberation Narrative, 14:30–31 (cf. the verbs “trust” and “see”).

Alter

And the people believed and heeded. In the event, the two signs of the staff and the hand are sufficient to win their trust (“believe” does not have any doctrinal sense here), and the third sign, of water turned to blood, can be reserved for the first plague.

Chapter 5

1. וְאַחַר בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיְחַגְּגוּ לִי
בַּמִּדְבָּר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness.	Afterward Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh: Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: Send free my people, that they may hold-a-festival to me in the wilderness!	And after that Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “YHWH, God of Israel, said this: Let my people go, so they will celebrate a festival for me in the wilderness.”	And afterward Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, “Thus said the LORD, God of Israel: ‘Send off My people that they may celebrate to Me in the wilderness.’”

Fox

hold-a-festival: Or “observe a pilgrimage-festival.” The Hebrew *hag* is still echoed in the great pilgrimage of Islam, the hajj, in which worshipers make (sometimes long) journeys to Mecca.

Friedman

Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh. It is against the background of the confrontation between Moses and God at the bush that we must picture the confrontation between Moses and the Pharaoh. The narrative that precedes the burning bush scene gives us relatively little background of the sort that would add depth and understanding of the character of Moses at the point of his meeting God. Moses' meeting with the Pharaoh, on the other hand, comes after we have seen him in conversation with the deity. That scene has revealed facets of his character, both strengths and weaknesses, that are now a part of the figure of Moses as he arrives on the scene of human affairs. Moreover, the encounter with God can hardly be disregarded itself as having impacted upon Moses' personality. He has received more than the three miracles with which to impress the Israelites and the Pharaoh. He has spoken with God. Presumably, setting foot on the floor of the palace is different after one has set foot on holy ground, and conversing with a king is different after one has conversed with the creator. Exodus leads us through a series of dynamics as Moses confronts, first, the deity, then a king, and then a community, with each dynamic growing more complicated as it becomes richer in background.

Alter

Thus said the lord: This is the so-called messenger formula, the conventional form for introducing the text, oral or written, of a message. The conveyor of the message may be divine, as here and repeatedly in the Prophets, or human, as in verse 10, where the message comes from Pharaoh. The phrase was regularly used at the beginning of letters.

Send off: The Hebrew verb *shileah* has a range of meanings: “to let go or dismiss,” “to divorce,” “to send guests decorously on their way,” “to grant manumission to a slave.” There is probably some ironic tension in this narrative between the positive and the negative senses of the verb, and since it is repeatedly played off against God’s “sending” out His hand or sending ministers of destruction, this translation represents the reiterated request to Pharaoh as “send off.”

The abruptness of Moses and Aaron’s address to the king of Egypt is noteworthy. They use none of the deferential forms of speech, none of the third-person bowing and scraping, which are conventional in biblical Hebrew for addressing a monarch. Instead, they immediately announce, “Thus said the LORD,” and proceed to the text of the message, which begins with an imperative verb, without the polite particle of entreaty, *na*’. William H. C. Propp observes that in doing this, Moses is not following God’s orders: he was to have spoken together with the elders, who appear to be absent; he was to have performed his two portents; he was to have threatened Pharaoh’s firstborn in God’s name. As to the absence of the elders, Rashi, following the Midrash, suggests that they slipped away in fear one by one as Moses and Aaron approached the palace.

2. וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלוֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־יְהוָה וְגַם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֲשַׁלַּח:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
But Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."	Pharaoh said: Who is YHWH, that I should hearken to his voice to send Israel free? I do not know YHWH, moreover, Israel I will not send free!	And Pharaoh said, "Who is YHWH that I should listen to His voice, to let Israel go?! I don't know YHWH, and also I won't let Israel go."	And Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should heed His voice to send off Israel? I do not know the LORD, nor will I send off Israel."

Fox

Who is YHWH: This attitude recalls an earlier obstacle to the liberation process, "Who am I" of Moshe (3:11).

I do not know YHWH: Colloquially, "I care not a whit for Yhwh!" To Pharaoh's pointed challenge, the entire narrative that follows is an answer (cf. 14:4, 18).

Friedman

Who is YHWH. The issue of YHWH's becoming known, which is to become a major component of subsequent books, begins in Exodus. In Genesis, YHWH is known personally only to a few individuals and to no nations. God's actions in the world are not identifiably God's. That is, the narrator informs the reader that it is YHWH who brings the flood, but the masses of humans in the narrative are not portrayed as being aware of the source of their catastrophe. There is likewise no suggestion that the generation of the tower of Babylon know whose force is confounding and scattering them. The same is true of the victims of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the only eyewitness turns to salt. Joseph informs the Pharaoh that it is God who brings his dream, who makes its interpretation known, and who is the cause of the events that it reveals; but Joseph refers to the deity only generically, as "God." He is never pictured as revealing to the Egyptians the name of the deity who is at work (Gen 41:16,25,28,32). In Exodus, however, YHWH makes His presence known to Israel, to Egypt, and to other inhabitants of the region (Exod 15:14-15). The Egyptian king's first words to Moses are, "Who is YHWH ...? I don't know YHWH" (5:2). By the end of the story he knows.

Alter

Who is the LORD, that I should heed His voice: The very name, YHWH, of this Semitic deity may be news to Pharaoh, and even if he grants that there is such a god, there is no reason that he, as an Egyptian polytheist and as a figure thought to have divine status himself, should recognize the authority of this Hebrew deity. (“I do not know the LORD” has the sense of “I refuse to recognize his divine authority.”) Pharaoh speaks here in quasipoetic parallel clauses, and D. N. Friedman has proposed that this may be coded as an aristocratic style of speech, a token of his regal stature.

3. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים נִקְרָא עָלֵינוּ נִלְכָּה נָא דֶרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
פֶּן־יִפְגְּעֵנוּ בַדֶּבֶר אוֹ בַתָּרָב:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
They answered, “The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He strike us with pestilence or sword.”	They said: The God of the Hebrews has met with us; now let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, and let us sacrifice to YHWH our God, lest he confront us with the pestilence or the sword!	And they said, “The God of the Hebrews has communicated with us. Let us go on a trip of three days in the wilderness so we may sacrifice to YHWH, our God, or else He’ll strike us with an epidemic or with the sword.”	And they said, “The God of the Hebrews happened upon us. Let us go, pray, a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, lest He hit us with pestilence or sword.”

Fox

pray let us go: A milder phrase than the earlier “Send free my people!”

three days’ journey: Either the magical three again, or a standard biblical way of describing a journey (see Gen. 22:4).

lest he confront us: In the ancient world the gods demanded sacrifices at specified times. “Confront” and “sword” also occur in VV.20–21, nicely balancing this section of narrative.

Friedman

Let us go on a trip of three days. Moses and Aaron do not ask for the Israelites liberation from Egypt. They ask only to make a three-day sacrificial pilgrimage. They just do not mention the fact that they do not plan to return!

strike. The word here (Hebrew *PG'*) is the same as the word for the Israelites' “meeting” Moses later in v. 20. The range of meanings of this root makes a wordplay that is enhanced by clustering with the blatant pun in the next verse.

strike us. Moses and Aaron say that God may strike "us," the Israelites, if they don't go to sacrifice to Him, but the Hebrew suffix has a subtle double meaning; it can also mean "strike him" — which could apply to Pharaoh himself or to a nonspecific Person, that is, to the Egyptians who will in fact suffer the plagues. The double meaning here is not merely playful but meaningful to the context.

Alter

Let us go, pray, a three days' journey into the wilderness: Speaking in God's name, they had made the request unconditionally, without stipulation of time limits. Now answering Pharaoh's indignation in their own voice, they use the cohortative verb form ("let us go") with the particle of entreaty ("pray") and mention the three days, which they presumably should have done at the outset.

lest He hit us with pestilence or sword: The proposal of some scholars that "us" be emended to "you" (because of the impending plagues) should be resisted. It was a perfectly understandable religious concept for peoples of the ancient Near East that a national deity might need to be propitiated through sacrifice. By couching their request for a furlough for the slaves in these terms, Moses and Aaron are saying to Pharaoh that the cultic expedition into the wilderness is no mere whim but a necessary means to avert the punishing wrath of the god of the Hebrews. In this fashion, they are pitching their argument to Pharaoh's self-interest, for dead slaves would be of no use to him.

4. וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמֶה מְשָׁה וְאַהֲרֹן תִּפְרִיעוּ אֶת־הָעַם מִמַּעֲשָׂיו לְכוּ לְסִבְלֹתֵיכֶם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
But the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you distract the people from their tasks? Get to your labors!"	The king of Egypt said to them: For-what-reason, Moshe and Aharon, would you let the people loose from their tasks? Go back to your burdens!	And the king of Egypt said to them, "Why, Moses and Aaron, do you turn the people loose from its work? Go to your burdens!"	And the king of Egypt said to them, "Why, Moses and Aaron, do you disturb the people from its tasks? Go to your burdens!"

Friedman

Turn loose: With the Hebrew root *pr'*, this is a pun on "Pharaoh." An even stronger play on this word will occur later, in the middle of the golden calf episode (Exod 32:25).

Go to your burdens! He talks down to Moses and Aaron, telling them to get back to work, and thus conveying to them that they are just slaves like everyone else.

5. וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה הֲגַדְתִּים עִתָּה עִם הָאָרֶץ וְהִשְׁבַּתְתֶּם אֹתָם מִסִּבְלָתָם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are already so numerous, and you would have them cease from their labors!"	Pharaoh said: Here, too many now are the people of the land, and you would have them cease from their burdens!	And Pharaoh said, "Here, the people of the land are now many, and you've made them cease from their burdens."	And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now many, and you would make them cease from their burdens!"

Fox
the people of the land: This phrase occurs here in its wider usage, i.e., the common folk, as opposed to what is found in Gen. 23:7, where the term indicates the landed nobility.
lest he confront us: In the ancient world the gods demanded sacrifices at specified times. "Confront" and "sword" also occur in VV.20–21, nicely balancing this section of narrative.

Friedman
cease. This is the term that describes God's ceasing on the seventh day of creation, Hebrew *sbt*, cognate to the word "Sabbath."s

Alter
the people of the land are now many: This phrase remains a little obscure. Because of the end of the sentence, it has to refer to the Hebrews. The most likely sense is that the Hebrew workforce has become vast (compare all the references to their proliferation in chapter 1), and so the Egyptian economy has come to depend on this multitude of slave laborers and can scarcely afford an interruption of their work.

6. וַיֵּצֵא פַרְעֹה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־הַנְּגִשִׁים בְּעָם וְאֶת־שֹׁטְרָיו לֵאמֹר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
That same day Pharaoh charged the taskmasters and foremen of the people, saying,	So that day Pharaoh commanded the slave-drivers of the people and its officers, saying:	And Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters among the people and its officers in that day, saying,	And Pharaoh on that day charged the people's taskmasters and its overseers, saying,

Fox

slave-drivers: In several Semitic languages *nagos* denotes “pressing” or “overpowering” (Ullendorff), hence “driving” here.

Alter

taskmasters . . . overseers: As becomes clear in what follows (e.g., verse 14), the taskmasters are Egyptian slave drivers, the overseers are Hebrew foremen. The former term, *noges*, derives from a root that means “to oppress” the latter term, *shoter*, is associated with a root meaning to “record in writing.”

7. לֹא תִאֲסֹפוּן לְתֵת תְּבֹן לְעָם לְלִבָּן הַלְּבָנִים כְּתִמּוֹל שְׁלֵשִׁים הֵם יִלְכוּ וְקִשְׁשׁוּ לָהֶם תְּבֹן:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
“You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks as heretofore; let them go and gather straw for themselves.	You are no longer to give straw to the people to make the bricks as yesterday [and the] day-before; let it be them that go and gather straw for themselves!	“You shall not continue to give straw to the people to make bricks as yesterday and the day before. <i>They</i> shall go and collect straw for themselves.	“You shall no longer give the people straw to make the bricks as in time past. They themselves will go and scabble for straw.

Alter

as in time past: The literal meaning of this common Hebrew idiom is “as yesterday [or] the day before.” At the end of verse 14, these two components of the idiom are broken out from the fixed formula, each being prefaced by the emphatic *gam* (“even,” “also”).

scrabble for straw The verb *qosheshu* is linked with its usual cognate-accusative object *qash*, “stubble” (see verse 12). “Straw” (*teven*) and “stubble” (*qash*) appear to be the same substance, with the latter in the condition of not having been picked from the ground. Crushed straw was used to give cohesiveness to the bricks before baking.

8. וְאֶת־מִתְכַּנֶּת־הַלְּבָנִים אֲשֶׁר הֵם עֹשִׂים תְּמוּל שְׁלֶשֶׁם תְּשִׂימוּ עֲלֵיהֶם לֹא תִגְרְעוּ מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי־נִרְפִים הֵם
עַל־כֵּן הֵם צֹעְקִים לֵאמֹר נִלְכָּה נִזְבַּחַה לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
But impose upon them the same quota of bricks as they have been making heretofore; do not reduce it, for they are shirkers; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God!’	But the [same] measure of bricks that they have been making, yesterday [and the] day-before, you are to impose on them; you are not to subtract from it! For they are lax—therefore they cry out, saying: Let us go, let us sacrifice to our God!	And you shall impose on them the quota of the bricks that they were making yesterday and the day before. You shall not subtract from it. Because they're lazy. On account of this they're crying, saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’	And the quota of bricks that they were making in the past you shall impose upon them, you shall not deduct from it, for they are idlers. Therefore do they cry out, saying, ‘Let us go sacrifice to our god.’

Alter

for they are idlers. The contemptuous term invoked here by Egypt’s head slave owner, *nirpim*, is derived from a verbal root that means “to relax,” “to loosen one’s grip,” “to let go.” It is the very verb that is used in 4:26, when the threatening deity of the Bridegroom of Blood episode “let him go.”

9. תְּכַבֵּד הָעֲבֹדָה עַל־הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־בָהּ וְאֶל־יַשְׁעוֹ בְּדַבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Let heavier work be laid upon the men; let them keep at it and not pay attention to deceitful promises."	Let the servitude weigh-heavily on the men! They shall have to do it, so that they pay (<i>or: let them pay</i>) no more regard to false words!	Let the work be heavy on the people, and let them do it, and let them not pay attention to words that are a lie!"	Let the work be heavy on the men and let them do it and not look to lying words!"

Friedman

Let the work be heavy. The idiom of Moses' "heavy mouth and heavy tongue" initiates a chain of puns on the various shades of meaning of the word "heavy" (Hebrew *kbd*, meaning weighty, difficult, or substantial). Here Pharaoh orders that the work of the Israelites be made heavy. The hardening of the Pharaoh's heart is expressed several times through this term (7:14; 8:11,28; 9:7,34; 10:1). Four of the plagues on Egypt are described as heavy: insects (8:20), pestilence (9:3), hail (9:18,24), and locusts (10:14). The Israelites leave with a heavy supply of livestock (12:38). As Moses holds up his arms in support of the Israelites while they battle the Amalekites, his arms become heavy (17:12). Moses' father-in-law warns him that his efforts to manage the entire nation on his own are foolish, "because the thing is too heavy for you" (18:18). The chain of puns culminates at Sinai, as a heavy cloud is on the mountain while the people hear the voice of God (19:16). It is not that the narrator's vocabulary is too limited to produce other adjectives. Rather, the construction of such chains of wordplay is a technique of biblical narrative, deployed in other biblical books as well. Here the chain contributes to the narrative's unity, rather than the narrative's appearing to be a series of loosely bound episodes.

10. וַיֵּצְאוּ נְגִישֵׁי הָעָם וְשֹׁטְרֵיוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר פַּרְעֹה אֵינֶנִּי נֹתֵן לָכֶם תְּבֹן:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
So the taskmasters and foremen of the people went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you any straw.	The slave-drivers of the people and its officers went out and said to the people, saying: Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you straw:	And the people's taskmasters and its officers went out and said to the people, saying, "Pharaoh said this: 'I am not giving you straw.	And the people's taskmasters and its overseers went out and said to the people, saying, "Thus said Pharaoh: 'I give you no straw.

Fox

Thus says Pharaoh: An ironic transformation of the prophetic formula noted in v.1 above, “the language of redemption turned sour”.

11. אָתֶם לְכוּ קַחוּ לָכֶם תְּבֹן מֵאֲשֶׁר תִּמְצְאוּ כִּי אֵין נִגְרַע מֵעֲבֹדְתְכֶם דָּבָר:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
You must go and get the straw yourselves wherever you can find it; but there shall be no decrease whatever in your work.”	<i>You go, get yourselves straw, wherever you can find [it]; indeed, not one [load] is to be subtracted from your servitude!</i>	You, go, take straw for yourselves from wherever you'll find it, because not a thing is subtracted from your work.”	As for you, fetch yourselves straw wherever you find it, because not a thing is to be deducted from your work.”

12. וַיִּפְּץ הָעָם בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְקַשֵּׁשׁ קֹשׁ לַתְּבֹן:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Then the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.	The people scattered throughout all the land of Egypt, gathering stubble-gatherings for straw.	And the people scattered through all the Land of Egypt to collect stubble for straw.	And the people spread out through all the land of Egypt to scabble for stubble for straw.

Alter

And the people spread out through all the land of Egypt to scabble for stubble: Even in this measure of aggravated oppression, the language of the story picks up the initial imagery of animal-like proliferation, which in turn harks back to the injunction in the Creation story to fill the land/earth.

13. וְהַנְּגִשִּׁים אֲצִים לְאֹמֶר כָּלֹּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם דְּבַר-יוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר בְּהִיּוֹת הַתְּבֹנָה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And the taskmasters pressed them, saying, "You must complete the same work assignment each day as when you had straw."	But the slave-drivers pressed them hard, saying: Finish your tasks, each-day's work-load in its day, as when there was straw!	And the taskmasters were prodding, saying, "Finish your work, the day's thing in that very day, as when there was the straw."	And the taskmasters were urging them, saying, "Finish your tasks at the same daily rate as when there was straw."

14. וַיִּכּוּ שׁוֹטְרֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-שָׂמוּ עֲלֵהֶם נְגִשֵׁי פְרַעֲה לְאֹמֶר מִדּוּעַ לֹא כָלִיתֶם תְּקֻכֶם לְלִבְנֵי כְּתָמוֹל שְׁלָשָׁם גַּם-תְּתָמוֹל גַּם-הַיּוֹם:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
And the foremen of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten. "Why," they were asked, "did you not complete the prescribed amount of bricks, either yesterday or today, as you did before?"	And they were beaten,* the officers of the Children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's slave-drivers had set over them; they said [to them]: For-what-reason have you not finished baking your allocation as yesterday [and the] day-before, so yesterday, so today?	And the officers of the children of Israel whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them were beaten — saying, Why haven't you finished your requirement to make brick like the day before yesterday, also yesterday, also today?"	And the overseers of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, saying, "Why have you not completed your tally for making bricks as in time past, neither yesterday nor today?"

Fox

beaten: An ironic transformation of the prophetic formula noted in v.1 above, "the language of redemption turned sour".

Alter

the overseers of the Israelites . . . were beaten: The Egyptians have instituted an effective chain of command for forced labor. It would not be feasible to beat all the teeming thousands of Hebrew slaves, so when they fail to produce their daily quota, the Israelite overseers are made personally responsible and are beaten by the Egyptian slave drivers. The overseers then turn in protest to Pharaoh, “crying out” (or “screaming”), which is the predictable reaction to a beating.

15. וַיָּבֹאוּ שֹׁטְרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְעֲקוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר לָמָּה תַעֲשֶׂה כֹה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Then the foremen of the Israelites came to Pharaoh and cried: “Why do you deal thus with your servants?”	So the officers of the Children of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying: Why do you do thus to your servants?	And the officers of the children of Israel came and cried to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you do a thing like this to your servants?"	And the Israelite overseers came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why should you do this to your servants?”

16. תָּכֵן אֵין גָּמֹן לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבָנִים אֹמְרִים לָנוּ עֲשׂוּ וְהִנֵּה עֲבָדֶיךָ מְכִים וְחֹטְאֵת עִמָּךְ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
No straw is issued to your servants, yet they demand of us: Make bricks! Thus your servants are being beaten, when the fault is with your own people.”	No straw is being given to your servants, and as for bricks—they say to us, Make [them]! Here, your servants are being beaten, and the fault is your people's!*	Straw isn't given to your servants, and they say to us: Make bricks. And here, your servants are beaten, and it's your people's sin."	Straw is not given to your servants, and bricks they tell us, make, and, look, your servants are beaten and the fault is your people's."

Fox

Your people's: Heb. *'ammekha*, which some read *'immakh* ("with you").

Alter

Straw is not given . . . bricks they tell us, make, and, look, your servants are beaten: There is a colloquial immediacy in the language with which the overseers express their outrage to Pharaoh, positioning "straw" and "bricks" at the beginning of the first and second clauses.

the fault is your people's: Presumably, the fault for the failure to fulfill the quota of bricks is the Egyptians' because they are not providing the straw.

17. וַיֹּאמֶר נְרָפִים אַתֶּם נְרָפִים עַל־כֵּן אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים נִלְכָּה נִזְבָּחָה לַיהוָה:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
He replied, "You are shirkers, shirkers! That is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.'	But he said: Lax are you, lax, therefore you say: Let us go, let us sacrifice to YHWH—	And he said, "You're lazy, lazy! On account of this you're saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to YHWH'"	And he said, "Idlers, you are idlers! Therefore you say, 'Let us go sacrifice to the LORD.'

Alter

Idlers, you are idlers! Therefore you say, "Let us go sacrifice to the LORD." In keeping with a common procedure of Hebrew narrative, phrases of previous dialogue are pointedly recycled. Pharaoh sarcastically quotes the phrase from Moses and Aaron's request about sacrificing to the LORD, and in a kind of incremental repetition, he picks up his own term, "idlers," and expands it to "Idlers, you are idlers!" These repetitions nicely convey a sense of inflexibly opposed sides in the conflict.

18. וְעַתָּה לְכוּ עֲבַדוּ וְתָכוּן לְאִי־יָתֵן לָכֶם וְתָכוּן לְבָנִים תַּחֲנוּן:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Be off now to your work! No straw shall be issued to you, but you must produce your quota of bricks!"	so-now, go—serve; no straw will be given to you, and the full-measure in bricks you must give back!	And now go, work! And straw will not be given to you, and you shall give the quota of bricks!"	And now, go work, and no straw will be given to you, but the quota of bricks you will give."

Fox
Go--serve: This phrase will be repeated three times during the Plague Narratives (10:8, 24; 12:31), with a different meaning: Go serve God! Pharaoh cannot wait to free the Israelites!

Alter
no straw will be given . . . but the quota of bricks you will give: By this point, “give” (*natan*) has emerged as a thematic key word of the episode. Pharaoh had announced in his message brought by the taskmasters, “I give you no straw.” The Hebrew overseers then complained, “Straw is not given,” and Pharaoh, picking up their very words, lashes back at them, “no straw will be given,” again stipulating that the slaves have the same obligation as before to “give” their quota of bricks.

19. וַיִּרְאוּ שְׂטָרֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָם בָּרַע לֵאמֹר לֹא־תִגְרְעוּ מִלְּבַנֵיכֶם דְּבַר־יּוֹם בְּיוֹמוֹ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Now the foremen of the Israelites found themselves in trouble because of the order, “You must not reduce your daily quantity of bricks.”	The officers of the Children of Israel saw that they were in an ill-plight, [having] to say: Do not subtract from your bricks each-day’s work-load in its day!	And the officers of the children of Israel saw themselves in a bad state — saying, “You shall not subtract from your bricks, the day’s thing in that very day.”	And the Israelite overseers saw themselves coming to harm, saying, “You shall not deduct from your bricks, from the same daily rate.”

Alter

saw themselves coming to harm. This is the understanding of the somewhat cryptic Hebrew *wayir'u . . . 'otam bera'* proposed by Abraham ibn Ezra and many other commentators. Still smarting from their recent whipping, they are acutely aware that they will be the first to suffer for the inability of the Hebrew slaves to maintain their usual quota of bricks.

20. וַיִּפְגְּעוּ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן נֹצְבִים לְקִרְיָתָם בְּצֵאתָם מֵאֵת פְּרַעֲהַ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
As they left Pharaoh's presence, they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path,	They confronted Moshe and Aharon, stationing themselves to meet them when they came out from Pharaoh;	And they met Moses and Aaron, standing opposite them when they came out from Pharaoh,	And they encountered Moses and Aaron poised to meet them as they came out from Pharaoh.

Alter

And they encountered Moses and Aaron poised to meet them: Moses and Aaron, who previously had acted as bold spokesmen, now wait awkwardly, perhaps nervously, outside the palace while the delegation of overseers brings its petition before Pharaoh. The verb for “encounter,” *paga'*, has both a neutral and a violent meaning. It indicates the meeting of persons or substances—including the “meeting” of forged iron with flesh, when it has the sense of “stab” or “hit,” as at the end of verse 3, above.

21. וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם יְרֵא יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֲשֶׁר הִבְאִשְׁתֶּם אֶת־רִיחֵנוּ בְּעֵינַי פְּרַעֲהַ וּבְעֵינַי עֲבָדָיו לְתַת־חֶרֶב בְּיָדָם לְהַרְגֵנוּ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
and they said to them, “May the LORD look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his	they said to them: May YHWH see you and judge,	and they said to them, “May YHWH look on you and judge, that you've made our smell odious in Pharaoh's eyes and in	And they said to them, “Let the LORD look upon you and judge, for you have made us repugnant in the eyes of Pharaoh and in

courtiers—putting a sword in their hands to slay us.”	for having made our smell reek in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, giving a sword into their hand, to kill us!	his servants' eyes, to give a sword in their hand to kill us!”	the eyes of his servants, putting a sword in their hand to kill us.”
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Fox

having made our smell reek: An expression meaning the causing of hatred or horror.

Friedman

our smell odious in Pharaoh's eyes. People smell with their noses, not their eyes! This may be just an expression or even the author's oversight, but I rather think that the contradiction is purposeful: the people's officers misspeak because they are upset. We frequently do that.

Alter

made us repugnant: The literal meaning of this common Hebrew idiom is “made our odor stink,” but the fact that the idiom is twice linked here with “eyes” suggests that the writer is not much thinking of its olfactory force.

putting a sword in their hand to kill us: Moses and Aaron, we should recall, had expressed the fear to Pharaoh that, without due sacrifice, the LORD would hit the people with pestilence or sword.

22. וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶדְנָי לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לְעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
As they left Pharaoh's presence, they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path,	Moshe returned to YHWH and said: My Lord, why have you dealt so ill with this people? Why have you sent me?	And Moses went back to YHWH and said, "My Lord, why have you done bad to this people? Why did you send me here?"	And Moses went back to the LORD, and said, "My lord, why have you done harm to this people, why have you sent me?"

why have you sent me? Moses's initial hesitancy to accept the mission imposed on him at Horeb seems to him perfectly confirmed now by the events. God has only made things worse for the Hebrew slaves (Moses, as it were, passes the buck he has received from the accusing overseers), and the whole plan of liberation shows no sign of implementation.

23. וַיִּמָּאֵז בְּאֵתֵי אֱלֹ-פְרָעֹה לְדַבֵּר בְּשֵׁמֶךָ הֲרַע לְעַם הַזֶּה וְהֵצִיל לֹא-הֵצִילְתָּ אֶת-עַמְּךָ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people."	Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has dealt only ill with this people, and rescued—you have not rescued your people!	And since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name he has done bad to this people, and you haven't rescued your people!"	Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done harm to this people and You surely have not rescued Your people."

Chapter 6

1. וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה עֲתָה תִּרְאֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לְפָרְעֹה כִּי בְיַד חֲזָקָה יִשְׁלַחַם וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה יִגְרְשִׂם מֵאֶרֶץ:

JPS	Fox	Friedman	Alter
Then the LORD said to Moses, "You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them	YHWH said to Moshe: Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh:	And YHWH said to Moses, "Now you'll see what I shall do to Pharaoh, because with a strong	And the LORD said to Moses, "Now will you see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong

go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.”	for with a strong hand he will send them free, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.	hand he'll let them go, and with a strong hand he'll drive them from his land.”	hand will he send them off and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land.”
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Fox

out of his land: The phrase is also used in connection with “sending free” in 6:11, 7:2, and 11:10.

Friedman

with a strong hand he'll let them go. But with whose strong hand? God's or Moses' own? The probable meaning is: God's. But the ambiguity is rich because either meaning is instructive.

Alter

And the LORD said. Although the conventional division puts this verse at the beginning of a new chapter, it actually sums up the preceding speech, whereas 6.2 marks the beginning of a new speech in which God offers a quasihistorical summary of His relationship with Israel and His future intentions toward Israel.

through a strong hand will he send them off and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land. The “strong hand”—that is, violent force—becomes a refrain in the story, here repeated in quasipoetic parallelism. The phrase refers to the violent coercion that God will need to exert on Pharaoh. It is noteworthy that the semantically double-edged “send” (to send away ceremoniously, to release, to banish) is here paired with the unambiguous “drive them from his land.” In the event, God’s strong hand will compel Pharaoh to expel the Hebrews precipitously, so that “let my people go” is reinterpreted as something like “banish my people.” The Exodus, in other words, extorted from a recalcitrant Egyptian monarch by an overpowering God, will prove to be a continuation of hostility, a fearful and angry expulsion of the slaves rather than a conciliatory act of liberation.