

NJPS saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

OJPS people, saying: "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive."

2 A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ²The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she

לְכָל-עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל-הַבֶּן הַיָּלֹד הַיֵּאֲרָה
תְּשַׁלְּכֵהוּ וְכָל-הַבֵּת תַּחֲיוֹן: ס

ב וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת-בֵּת
לֵוִי: ²וַתְּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֵּרָא אוֹתוֹ

RASHI was born today. We do not know whether he is an Egyptian or an Israelite. But we can see that his end will come by means of water." So Pharaoh issued his decree that very day, against the Egyptians as well as against the Israelites. Read carefully! It does not say, "every boy that is born to the Hebrews," but "every boy that is born." What the astrologers did not understand was that the "waters" through which Moses would come to harm were the waters of Meribah. [C]

2:1 Married a Levite woman. Rather, "took the daughter of Levi." He had separated from her in order not to conceive children who would then fall victim to Pharaoh's decree. Now he brought her back and "took" her to wife a second time. She was even turned back into a young woman, though she was 130 at the time. For she had been born on the journey down to Egypt, just as they arrived, and the Israelites were in Egypt for 210 years. Since Moses was 80 when they left, she must have been 130 when she got pregnant with him. But she also became young again, for the text calls her "daughter" of Levi. [D]

2 How beautiful he was. When he was born, the whole house filled with light. [E]

[C] For striking the rock there to get water, Moses is punished by not being allowed to live long enough to cross into the land of Israel. See Num. 20:1-13 and Deut. 32:50-51. [D] When the descendants of Jacob who came down to Egypt are listed in the book of Numbers, Jochebed is included with the note that she "was born to Levi in Egypt" (Num. 26:59), having presumably been conceived in Canaan or on the journey down. The fact that Moses has older siblings implies that Amram and Jochebed had already been married before the marriage described in 2:1. [E] Rashi's source, B. Sotah 12a, is based on the resemblance of our verse—literally, "She saw him, that he was good"—to Gen. 1:4, "God saw the light, that it was good."

NAHMANIDES is quite plentiful in Egypt. The Israelites would get them from those who caught them at the king's order, and would get cucumbers and melons from the gardens, "with no one to molest them" (Judg. 18:7). For it was the king's command. But our Sages say that they were slaves to the kings themselves, not to the subjects of the kings. If so, then the Egyptians who imposed upon them were Pharaoh's taskmasters.

2:1 A certain man of the house of Levi went. Our Sages said that he "went" to get her back after taking his daughter's advice to end their separation (see below). Ibn Ezra says that the Jews lived in many different cities, and he "went" from his own city to hers in order to marry her. But what point would there be for the text to mention this? In my opinion, the text is emphasizing that he ignored the danger posed by Pharaoh's decree and got married with the intention of having children. For the text uses the expression "went and did" about everyone who bestirs himself to do some new action: e.g., "Reuben went and lay with Bilhah" (Gen. 35:22); "he went and married Gomer" (Hosea 1:1). This man too "went" and married a Levite woman. The text does not mention either of their names, because if it did so it would have had to give their entire genealogies right back to Levi. But at this point, in a hurry to get to the birth of Israel's savior, the text wished to be brief. Afterward, in 6:14-25, the text will give the complete genealogy of Reuben and Simeon in order to get down to Levi and to the parents of Moses. According to the

produces defective offspring are wrong; the prohibitions against incest are not for practical reasons, but to make Israel a holy people. [F]

2 The woman conceived. We know that Aaron was older than Moses. This passage does not mention him because nothing happened to him in his youth, as it did to Moses. A similar phenomenon is found in 2 Sam. 12:24, where Solomon appears to be David's first living child; yet, according to 2 Sam. 5:14, Shammua, Shobab, and Nathan had already been born to him. Miriam, too, was older; our ancestral tradition identifies her with Puah, the midwife, and v. 4 says explicitly that Moses' sister stationed herself to watch over him. Ben Zuta reads Num. 26:59, "she bore ... Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam," as implying that Miriam was the youngest; but this

[F] Lev. 18:12 prohibits sex with the sister of one's father. But the examples of Aaron, Miriam, and Moses show that the reason for the prohibition is not that the children will be defective.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS appropriate reward for giving life, for the mark of a complete leader is that he provides for the welfare of those whom he leads (Gersonides).

22 Let every girl live. Pharaoh assumed the girls would marry Egyptians and be assimilated (Gersonides).

2:1 A Levite woman. The tradition quoted by Rashi says that Jochebed was 130 when Moses was born. My own calculations, according to the rabbinic assumption that she was born just as the sons of Jacob entered Egypt, make her 145. In either case, this would be a greater miracle than happened to Sarah; one would think the Torah would have mentioned it. But the whole assumption is the height of absurdity. If she was born at the end of Levi's life, long after he arrived in Egypt, she would have been 58 at Moses' birth, which is a good deal less strange (Gersonides).

2 She hid him for three months. The Egyptians did not realize she was pregnant for three months, at which point they began to

2 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. ²And the woman conceived, and bore a son; and when she saw him that he was a

RASHBAM 2:1 A certain man of the house of Levi. It was Amram. Married Jochebed, a Levite woman. Literally, with OJPS, "a daughter of Levi"; we know from Num. 26:59 that she "was born to Levi in Egypt." He married her some years before the birth of Moses. For according to 7:7, Aaron was 83 and Moses was 80 when they spoke to Pharaoh, making Aaron, their first child, three years older than his younger brother.

2 The woman conceived at the time of Pharaoh's decree about casting the boys into the Nile and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him. One who explains this to mean that she hid him because she saw he was beautiful is a liar. For the mothers of all newborns have maternal instincts toward them. So "saw" must be explained as we explained it in Gen. 1:31, "God saw all that He had made, and found it very good." He looked at all He had made and at all the actions He had performed to see whether any of them needed repair. It turned out that everything was fine and in good repair. The same applies here. Moses was presumably born at the end of six months—just as Samuel was

IBN EZRA 2:1 Went. Apparently she lived in another city. All the Israelites lived in Rameses, but there were a number of different cities there. A Levite woman. Literally, with OJPS, "a daughter of Levi" the son of Jacob. This is clear from Num. 26:59, where she is referred to as "Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt." Thus she is the sister of Kohath. That is why 6:20, naming her husband Amram, calls her "his father's sister." This demonstrates that those who say inbreeding

NJPS hid him for three months.³ When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the

OJPS goodly child, she hid him three months.³ And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch; and she put the child therein, and laid it in

בִּיטוּב הוּא וַתַּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:
וְלֹא יָכְלָה עוֹד הַצְפִּינוֹ וַתִּקַּח-לוֹ תֵּבַת
גִּמָּא וַתַּחמֶרָה בַּחֲמֵר וּבִזְפֹת וַתִּשֶׂם בָּהּ
אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשֶׂם בְּסוֹף עַל-שַׁפֵּת הַיָּאָר:

RASHI 3 She could hide him no longer. For the Egyptians had been calculating the days since her husband brought her back. She actually gave birth to Moses after six months and a day, which is quite possible, for B. Nid. 38b tells us that "a woman who bears at seven months may give birth before the full number of months has been completed." The Egyptians finally came around to check up on her at the end of the ninth month. **Wicker.** It is strong and pliable. **Bitumen and pitch.** Not "bitumen," but "mortar." [F] Unlike Noah's ark, which was caulked with pitch inside and out, Moses' was caulked with clay inside and pitch only on the outside, so that the righteous child should not have to smell the pitch.

[F] See Gen. 11:3.

NAHMANIDES straightforward meaning, this verse refers not to a reunion after a separation but to their actual marriage; the events in the Torah are not narrated in strict chronological order. For they were married, and she bore Miriam and Aaron, before Pharaoh's decree. After the decree that every boy who was born should be cast into the Nile, she bore this "beautiful" (v. 2) son. The text does not describe the births of Miriam and Aaron, because there was nothing unusual about them. According to our Sages, this was a remarriage, for the man had separated from his wife in order not to father a child who would be killed by Pharaoh's decree and brought her back after Miriam prophesied that her mother would bear a son who would save Israel. [E] In this case, "married" implies that they celebrated the reunion as if it were a marriage: He brought her back to his home in a bridal palanquin, with Miriam and Aaron dancing joyfully before them, for by this means Israel would be redeemed. Even though Aaron was still too young to understand this, God put joy in his heart about it. Or perhaps his sister Miriam told him to rejoice.

2-4 When she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him. It is well known that women love their children, beautiful or not, and they would all hide them to the best of their ability; there was no need to say that he was beautiful to explain why she hid him. The reason why this detail was included is that she saw in him an unprecedented beauty and thought that a miracle might be done for him, and he would be saved. So she set her mind to devise a plan. When she saw that she could hide him no longer, she thought he

[E] In 15:20, Miriam is called "the prophetess, Aaron's sister," which the Sages took to imply that she had prophesied before Moses' birth, when she was the sister only of Aaron, and not (yet) of Moses.

How beautiful he was. Literally, not "beautiful" but "good." In reference to a grown man, "good" can refer to intellectual or spiritual qualities; but with reference to a baby, it can only refer to physical ones. **Three months.** Some say this implies he was born at the beginning of the seventh month of her pregnancy, when the Egyptians expected her to still be pregnant for another three months. But this is a midrash—the Egyptians had no way of knowing when a woman got pregnant. The text is merely telling us how long she was able to hide him. It is extremely farfetched to think that a child born at six months could survive. Everyone knows that the standard length of pregnancy is nine months, so much so that the date of conception can be figured by subtracting nine months from the date of birth. I have done this five times myself. [H]

3 When she could hide him no longer. The text does not tell us why, but perhaps the Egyptian neighbor women heard his voice. We know from 3:22 that there were Egyptians living among them even in Goshen. **Bitumen.** Etymologically related to the word translated "caulked"; as used here, it refers to a sticky red clay found in the land of Israel. Arabic has the same word. **She put the child into it.** She thought, like Hagar, "Let me not look on as the child dies" (Gen. 21:16). Or perhaps Miriam had prophetically told her to do so. God's designs are subtle indeed; it may well be that He arranged the whole affair so as to have Moses grow up in the palace, at a high intellectual level, rather than in the debased environment of a slave. Moreover, his kinsmen would not have respected him when it was time for him to lead them out of slavery if he had grown up among them. **Reeds.** The Hebrew word is the name of a plant found in a riverine environment.

[G] Eleazar b. Zuta was a 10th-century Karaite biblical commentator. Among Ibn Ezra's counter examples are the frequent listing of Noah's sons as "Shem, Ham, and Japheth" vs. the reverse order in Genesis 10, and "there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried" (Gen. 49:31), though Sarah (who was buried by Abraham) was obviously buried first. [H] Ibn Ezra goes on to discuss the astrological implications of the nine-month delay between conception and birth. His comment suggests that he himself had five children, but little is known about his family.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS count nine months (Bekhor Shor). Since Moses was born on the 7th of Adar, he was hidden until the 6th of Sivan—the same day the Torah would later be given (Hizkuni).

3 When she could hide him no longer. A three-month-old cries much more loudly than a newborn (Gersonides). **Wicker.** Wicker is a reed; so the basket would not be noticed when she placed it in the reeds (Bekhor Shor). **Among the reeds by the bank of the Nile.** Sugarcane is grown on the banks of the Nile, and this is where she placed the basket—not in the river (Abarbanel).

RASHBAM born "after the seasons of the days" (1 Sam. 1:20), implying two seasons of three months each, plus two days. This would explain why she was able to hide him for three months. For the Egyptians would check up on all the pregnant women at the end of nine months. So when Moses was born, she looked to see whether he was a stillbirth, in which case she need not bother to hide him, and saw that he was good and fine. For he had hair and nails, which are signs of viability according to B. Yev. 80b. So she knew that he would live, and she hid him for three months, until the end of the nine months that are the normal period of gestation. And when they came to check on her, she told them she had miscarried. For otherwise they would have thrown him into the Nile.

3 Hide him. Note that the unusual pointing means this word should be pronounced *ha-tz'-fi-no*. **With bitumen** on the inside **and pitch** on the outside, to make it watertight. **Among the reeds** in the water **by the bank of the Nile.** She hid it well, so that passersby along the bank of the Nile could not see the basket. But those who actually bathed in the river could see it, for Jochebed did not go into the river to make sure it was hidden on every side. That is how Pharaoh's daughter, who was bathing in the river, saw it. But her maidens, who were walking along the bank of the Nile (v. 5), were unable to see it.

IBN EZRA blind man has forgotten the many biblical examples showing that word order has nothing to do with chronology. [G]

NJPS bank of the Nile. ⁴And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew

OJPS the flags by the river's brink. ⁴And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.

⁵And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river; and her maidens walked along by the river-side; and she saw the ark among the flags, and sent her handmaid to fetch it. ⁶And she opened it, and saw it, even the child; and behold a boy that wept. And she had compassion on him, and said: "This is one of the Hebrews"

RASHI 5 Her maidens walked along the Nile. Literally, "were going, the Nile at hand." The idiom comes from the closeness of a man's hand to his body. But our Sages say "going" means they were "going" to die (as in Gen. 25:32, where Esau says, "I am going to die"), because they tried to prevent

her from taking Moses out of the water. The text gives them some support, for why do we need to be told that her maidens were *going* with her? **Her slave girl.** The Sages read *amatah* in its other meaning, "her forearm" (though grammatically this would require a double *m*), the same word that in the plural means "cubits." They take it to mean that her arm lengthened as many cubits as it took to reach the basket.

6 When she opened it, she saw that it was a child. That is the straightforward meaning. But the verse can also be read to say, "She saw it *with* the child," which can be

NAHMANIDES might be rescued by some other scheme and made a **wicker basket** for him. **His sister stationed herself at a distance** so as not to be recognized, **to learn what would befall him.** All this supports the words of our Sages, who explained that the radiant beauty of the baby Moses filled the whole house with light and that Miriam had prophesied, "My mother is going to bear a son who will save Israel."

5 Came down to bathe in the Nile. Literally, "on" the Nile. It may be that there were terraces in the Nile, and she came down from the palace to bathe on the first terrace. So she did not enter the actual current of the Nile, but saw the ark in the reeds at a distance from her **and sent her slave girl to fetch it.** Or "on the Nile" is simply idiomatic for "in" the Nile, as the translations take it.

6 A boy crying. Rashi explains that he had the voice of a boy, not a baby. But R. Nehemiah in B. Sotah 12b has already refuted this explanation: "If so, you have made our master Moses into one possessed of a blemish." [F] Moreover, why would the text mention the depth of his voice? Ibn Ezra thinks that his limbs were shaped like those of a boy rather than those of an infant and that this was to add to the description of his beauty, which is what made Pharaoh's daughter save him. But it would be more correct to explain it that he was crying as powerfully as a boy and that this is why she took pity on him. The legend is that even as a baby he was acting like a grown boy—until the angel Gabriel came and hit him to make him cry and arouse pity in Pharaoh's daughter. But in my opinion there is no need for all this. A baby can be called a boy from the very day of his birth, as when Samson's father asks for instructions about "how to act with the boy that is to be born" (Judg. 13:8). Similarly, Samuel is called a "boy" when Hannah brings him to Shiloh, though he cannot be older than 24 months, for he has just been weaned off milk (1 Sam. 1:23-24). **This must be a Hebrew child.** She realized he must have been put there either in order to save him or so as not to "look on as the child dies" (Gen. 37:22). And why would an Egyptian need to do this? Some say that she could tell he was a Hebrew because she saw that he was circumcised. But in order to know this she would have had to take off his clothes and check him. And there is no need for this explanation. [G]

[F] The Levites were singers in the Temple; but if this explanation were correct, Moses would have an abnormal voice and be disqualified from serving. [G] Nahmanides does not accept the rabbinic midrash (see Rashi to 1:22) that the decree applied to Egyptian as well as Hebrew boys.

length—to keep it from being visible to any passerby; and a Pharaoh's daughter would not plunge into the reeds in this way.

6 She saw that it was a child. Literally, as in OJPS, "she saw it—the child." **A boy crying.** His limbs were formed as if he were already a full-grown boy. She saw that he was circumcised and, because of his beauty, she took pity on him; this is why v. 2 makes such a point of his being beautiful.

[I] Since Aaron, the oldest sibling, is three years older than Moses (see 7:7), Miriam could not have been more than two, too young to be the "sister" in this passage.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 4 **His sister.** She must have been about 15, but her age is nowhere mentioned (Abarbanel). **Stationed herself.** Literally, "she [her mother] stationed her" (Bekhor Shor). **To learn what would befall him.** She assumed some Egyptian would take him in; the Egyptians were so promiscuous that many illegitimate children must have been abandoned (Sforno).

6 **A Hebrew child.** Who had been cast into the Nile (Bekhor Shor).

RASHBAM 5 Her slave girl. Not "her forearm."

6 When she opened it, she saw that it was a child. This translation is mistaken. Who doesn't know that if she opened the basket she would see it was a child? What it means is that she opened the basket and looked at the child to see whether it was male or female, and saw that it was a **boy**, that is, that it was male and not female. She saw that his penis was circumcised and realized that it was not an abandoned baby—as she might have thought had it been a girl—but had been deliberately hidden. Note that in the story of Samson we find the expression, "how to act with the boy that is to be born" (Judg. 13:8)—it is called a "boy" on the very day that it is born. **A boy crying.** She took pity on it. She took pity on it because it was crying. And because she saw that it was a circumcised boy, she said, **This must be a Hebrew child.** [D]

[D] Thus the text responds to "a boy" and "crying" in reverse order—first to "crying" (she took pity) and then to the child's being a boy ("This must be a Hebrew child"). Rashbam notes a similar literary phenomenon in the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1.

IBN EZRA 4 **His sister.** This may merely mean a female relation of some kind. [I]

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down. "Down" because water is always at a lower level; and of course Pharaoh's daughter came down from the palace. **To bathe.** This was the custom of the Egyptian ladies. **Her maidens.** That is, her maidservants, who attended her. **She ... sent her slave girl.** One of the maidens. Grammatically, *amah* cannot possibly mean "her arm," as the midrash has it. In any case, the *amah* that means "cubit" is a unit of measure—it does not mean "forearm." Moreover, why would the text have bothered to mention her maidens if she got the baby herself? In any case, the basket was placed quite far from shore—certainly more than an arm's

NJPS child." ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" ⁸And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

¹¹Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian

RASHI interpreted midrashically as follows: What did she see with the child? The Shekhinah. A boy crying. He already had the voice of a boy, not a baby.

7 A Hebrew nurse. For she had taken him to a number of Egyptian nurses, but he would not suck from them with the mouth that would one day speak with the Shekhinah.

8 The girl went. She went with alacrity. The text uses the unusual word *almah* for "girl" to suggest *alimut*, "vigor."

9 Take this child. When Pharaoh's daughter told Jochebed, "Take," *heilichi*, she had no idea that she was speaking prophetically: *Hei lichi*: "He is yours."

10 I drew him out. Hebrew *m'shitihu*.

The Targum explains this word correctly. Menahem derives the name from מוש, but I say the correct root is משה, "to take out" (as in 2 Sam. 22:17 and Ps. 18:17, "He drew me out of the mighty waters"). To be from מוש, it would have to be *mashti*, not *mashiti*.

11 When Moses had grown. V. 10 already says "when the child grew up"; the verbs are exactly the same in the Hebrew. R. Judah says: V. 10 means that he attained his full growth; v. 11 means that he had grown in power, for Pharaoh put him in charge of his household. **Witnessed their labors.** Literally, "he saw in their labors"—he saw himself in

NAHMANIDES **11 When Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk.** That is, when he had grown to be a man. The "growing up" in v. 10 merely implies that he had grown too old to nurse, so his mother brought him to Pharaoh's daughter and she adopted him, so he might "attend upon kings" (Prov. 22:29). Afterward he grew to the age of maturity. **He went out to his kinsfolk.** He had been told that he was a Jew, and he wanted to see them because they were his kinsfolk. But when he saw their toilsome labors, he could not bear it, so he killed the Egyptian who was beating the oppressed Jew.

single person has two names, the text states this clearly: "Esau—that is, Edom" (Gen. 36:1); "Abram, that is, Abraham" (1 Chron. 1:27). Otherwise one would presume that two different names referred to two separate people. There are innumerable cases where two biblical names are identified midrashically as being the same person, [K] but the bottom line is what the *ge'onim* say: There is no need to reconcile contradictions with, or within, the midrash. **Explaining.** Perhaps she learned our language, or asked someone.

11 He went out of the palace to his kinsfolk. The Egyptians. [L]

[J] "Monius" has been explained as a rendering of the name Menes, the legendary first king of Egypt. [K] Ibn Ezra goes on to deal at length with the cases of Nehemiah and of Caleb. [L] This is incomprehensible, unless Ibn Ezra thinks that "one of his kinsmen" refers to the attacker, rather than the victim. The commentators disagree on whether to read "the Egyptians" as a mistake for "the Hebrews," or whether Ibn Ezra referred to the Israelites who were living in Egypt (as opposed to those living in Goshen) as "Egyptians." Neither solution is completely satisfying.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7 A Hebrew nurse.** For an Egyptian nurse would not be willing to suckle a Hebrew child (Hizkuni).

8 The child's mother. The milk of his own mother is better for a child than that of any other (Gersonides).

10 She named him Moses. Either she had converted to Judaism and learned Hebrew, as our rabbis suggest, or Jochebed named him and explained the name to her (Hizkuni). The grammatical form has been misunderstood. The verse means: She (Jochebed) named him Moses, explaining to Pharaoh's daughter, "You drew him out of the water" (Abarbanel).

11 He went out to his kinsfolk. Either it was well known in the palace that Moses was a Hebrew, or else Pharaoh's daughter told him (Gersonides).

OJPS children." ⁷Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter: "Shall I go and call thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?" ⁸And Pharaoh's daughter said to her: "Go." And the maiden went and called the child's mother.

⁹And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her: "Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." And the woman took the child, and nursed it. ¹⁰And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said: "Because I drew him out of the water."

¹¹And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a

RASHBAM **10 I drew him out.** Hebrew *m'shitihu*. The verb משה is a variant of משר "to pull" with the particular meaning of "pull out of the water"; see also Ps. 18:17, "He drew me out of the mighty waters."

11 Beating a Hebrew. Except for the archaism, OJPS "smiting" is a more accurate translation, since the same Hebrew word may mean either "kill" or "beat"; but NJPS may well be correct.

IBN EZRA **9 Take this child.** Saadia reads "take," *heilichi*, as *hei lichi*, "he is yours." But this is incorrect; we find no such expression anywhere in the Bible. Compare it to "nurse it," which is grammatically similar.

10 Made him her son. That is, adopted him, as Naomi does to Obed in Ruth 4. **Moses** is the Hebrew translation of his Egyptian name, which was Monius. [J] The Talmud (B. Meg. 13a) reads 1 Chron. 4:18 to say that Moses had six other names, and Leviticus Rabbah adds three more. Which is surprising, since names are contingent on accidental factors and not part of the essence of what they name, as I will explain shortly in connection with "When they ask me, 'What is His name?'" (3:16). How could 1 Chron. 4:18 say "These were the sons of Bithiah daughter of Pharaoh" if all the names referred to a single person? When a

NJPS beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen. ¹²He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" ¹⁴He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! ¹⁵When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.

RASHI their labors, empathized with them, and grieved for them. **An Egyptian.** He was one of the taskmasters appointed to oversee the Israelite foremen, and he would get them up for work at cockcrow. **Beating a Hebrew.** Whipping him cruelly. It was the husband of Shelomith daughter of Dibri. The taskmaster wanted her. At night he had roused the husband for work and gotten him out of the house, then returned and had sex with the man's wife, who thought it was her husband. When the man came home, he realized what had happened. When the Egyptian saw that the man had found out, he beat him cruelly all day long.

12 He turned this way and that. That is, Moses "turned this way" and saw what the taskmaster had done to the man at home, and "turned that way" and saw what he had done to him in the field. But contextually it means that he looked around. **Seeing no one about.** Read with OJPS, "When he saw that there was no man" among the potential descendants of the Egyptian who would convert to Judaism.

13 Two Hebrews. Dathan and Abiram, the same two who would later leave some of the manna over until morning (16:20). **Fighting.** That is, arguing. **Why do you strike your fellow?** Literally, "why will you strike your fellow?" Though he had not struck him yet, Moses knew that the one who raised his fist against the other was the offender. **Your fellow** in wickedness.

14 Who made you chief and ruler over us? Literally, "Who made you a man to be chief and ruler over us?" Who made you a man? You are still just a boy! **Do you mean to kill me?** Literally, "Do you say to kill me?" From this we learn that he killed the Egyptian by speech—by pronouncing the Tetragrammaton. **Moses was frightened.** The contextual meaning is straightforward. Midrashically, having found that there were some among the Israelites wicked enough to reveal what he had done, he was frightened that they would no longer deserve redemption. **Then the matter is known!** Again, this is straightforward contextually. Midrashically, it means: Now the matter I was puzzled about—what was the sin of the Israelites that they, of all the 70 nations, should be subjected to such harsh toil?—"is known" to me. For I see that they deserve it.

15 Pharaoh learned of the matter. Because Dathan and Abiram told him. **He sought to kill Moses.** He handed him over to the executioner, but the sword had no

NAHMANIDES **14 Do you mean to kill me?** Literally, "Do you say to kill me?" Rashi says that Moses killed the Egyptian by means of the Tetragrammaton; this is a rabbinic midrash. If that were how it happened, I wonder who told the offending Hebrew that Moses had killed the Egyptian? Perhaps Moses put his hand on him and cursed him in the name of the Lord, and this explains "he struck" (v. 12). Or perhaps when the Egyptian fell dead before him, Moses feared that they would accuse him, so he buried him in the sand. But the Hebrew saw him doing it and knew that Moses had caused the death, or perhaps, having seen only the burial, he thought Moses had physically slain him. NJPS follows Ibn Ezra's suggestion here. But there is no need for this explanation. What the offender said was this: "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you say 'Why do you strike your fellow?' (v. 13) because you wish to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **12 He struck down the Egyptian.** Who had earned death according to the Noahide commandments by committing adultery with the Hebrew's wife; see Rashi's comment (Hizkuni). **The sand.** Which was there for use in the construction (Hizkuni).

14 Chief and ruler. To kill me without due process of law (Bekhor Shor).

OJPS Hebrew, one of his brethren. ¹²And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. ¹³And he went out the second day, and, behold, two men of the Hebrews were striving together; and he said to him that did the wrong: "Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?" ¹⁴And he said:

"Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? thinkest thou to kill me, as thou didst kill the Egyptian?" And Moses feared, and said: "Surely the thing is known." ¹⁵Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

RASHBAM **14 Do you mean to kill me** because I am beating my coworker as you killed the Egyptian because he was beating a Hebrew? **Then the matter is known!** Better, "so," in such a way, the matter is known—not as I thought when I hid him in the sand, that it would not be known, but it is so—it is known.

15 He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well. The translation is misleading; the same verb is used in both instances. The text tells us in general terms that he "settled" in Midian, and then elaborates: he "settled" down by a well when he first rested, like a man who stops to take a breather.

IBN EZRA **12** Those who say that **he struck down the Egyptian** by means of the Tetragrammaton are incorrect, as I shall explain. He struck him with a stone or with a spear.

13 The offender. The one of the two who was doing violence to the other.

14 Do you mean to kill me? Literally, "Are you saying to kill me?"; but (as NJPS recognizes) "say" often has the meaning of "think" or "intend," as in the expression "I said in my heart" (Eccles. 2:1). **Then.** Indeed. But some say it means "if so." [M]

15 Beside a well. Literally, "beside the well"—the famous well. Or it could be that it was the only well there. Since Midian was within the Egyptian sphere of influence, Moses was forced to become a shepherd, avoiding urban areas where he might be recognized. Only when God told him that those he had been fleeing were dead did he feel safe.

[M] In the long commentary, Ibn Ezra switches to this opinion.

NJPS ¹⁶Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock; ¹⁷but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock. ¹⁸When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" ¹⁹They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰He said to his daughters, "Where is he then? Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break

RASHI power over him, as we know from Moses' saying in 18:4, "He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." **Sat down beside a well.** He had learned from the example of Jacob that this was a good way to meet one's mate.

16 The priest of Midian. That is, their chief. But he had abandoned idolatry, and they had excommunicated him. **The troughs.** These were made directly in the ground.

17 Drove them off. They could never have done this to the daughters of such an important man if he had not been excommunicated.

18 Reuel. Some think Reuel was Jethro's father, and "father" here means "ancestor"; see my comment to 4:18.

20 Why did you leave the man? He recognized him for a descendant of Jacob, because the water in the well rose up to meet him. **[G] To break bread.** "Cast your bread upon the waters" (Eccles. 11:1)—perhaps he will marry one of you! And see my comment to "Nothing save the bread that he ate" (Gen. 39:6).

[G] He could not have watered the flock so quickly otherwise. At Gen. 47:10 Rashi explains that Jacob gave Pharaoh the blessing that forever after the waters of the Nile would rise up to meet him. When the water in the well rose up to meet Moses, Reuel knew that he must be from the family that could grant this power over water.

NAHMANIDES **16 The priest of Midian had seven daughters.** The text does not mention his name, but it is clear from the phrase that describes him that he was the most honored of that priesthood—and that it was Jethro. For after Moses becomes his son-in-law the text writes, "Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro ... and Jethro said to Moses, 'Go in peace'" (4:18). They are two versions of the same name. Similarly we find Elijah sometimes spelled in the Hebrew text "Elijah" and Jeremiah "Jeremiah." But after Jethro converted to Judaism he was called Hobab, as we know from Judg. 4:11, "Hobab, father-in-law of Moses." For it is the way of converts to call themselves by a different name when they become Jews. **[H]** His father's name was Reuel, as we know from Num. 10:29, where he is called "Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite." When it says in our own text "When they returned to their father Reuel" (v. 18), it really means their grandfather. Similarly Jacob in Gen. 32:10 says, "God of my father Abraham," though Abraham was really his grandfather. There are many such occurrences in the Bible. In this particular case, the daughters are described as returning to their grandfather because their father was detained at the temple with his priestly duties. But when it says "Moses consented to stay with the man" (v. 21), "the man" might refer to Jethro, since it was he who gave him Zipporah, his daughter. **They came ... and filled the troughs.** Because the shepherds would come every day and fill the troughs and water their sheep first, and afterward these women would water theirs. On this particular day it happened that the women got there first. They filled the troughs thinking they could water their sheep before the shepherds got there. But the shepherds arrived and drove them away so that they could water their sheep first, as they did every day. But Moses was angry at such violence and helped the women. For since they had filled the troughs, the water was theirs. He "even drew water" for them (v. 19), for the water in the troughs was not enough for their sheep.

19 An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds who drive us away from the troughs every day, though we are there first.

[H] Nahmanides may also be thinking of the reverse phenomenon, the Spanish Jews who converted to Christianity and changed their names, like Pablo Christiani, his opponent in a famous disputation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **17 Moses rose to their defense.** But this time, since neither of the parties was Israelite, he did not try to punish or prove the offenders (Sforno). This story is juxtaposed to those of vv. 11-14 (even though it took place long afterward) to demonstrate that Moses was just, honest, and bighearted—the very qualities that prepare one for true prophecy (Abarbanel).

19 An Egyptian. They could tell by his clothing and his language (Bekhor Shor). Possibly, or perhaps they had asked him (Gersonides).

OJPS ¹⁶Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷And the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.

¹⁸And when they came to Reuel their father, he said: "How is it that ye are come so soon today?" ¹⁹And they said: "An Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and moreover he drew water for us, and watered the flock." ²⁰And he said unto his daughters: "And where is he? Why is it that ye have left the man? call

RASHBAM **18 Their father Reuel.** Their father's father. In which case their father's name was Jethro, the same person as "Hobab son of Reuel" who is mentioned in Num. 10:29. But if Reuel was really their father, the same person as Jethro, then Hobab was Jethro's son. But Judg. 4:11, "Hobab, father-in-law of Moses," proves that Hobab is Jethro. For everywhere else that it mentions "father-in-law of Moses" it mentions Jethro.

IBN EZRA **16 The priest of Midian.** This is Jethro, not Reuel (see v. 18). "Priest" in Biblical Hebrew can refer to one who serves any god, false or true. But Jethro was indeed a priest of the true God, as I shall explain in my comment to 19:6.

18 Their father Reuel. He was really their grandfather. For their father was Hobab (also known as Jethro). This is shown by the reference in Judg. 4:11 to "Hobab, father-in-law of Moses," and in Num. 10:29 to Hobab as "son of Reuel the Midianite." **[N]**

19 Drew water for us. Since v. 16 says that they themselves drew water, this is either the girls' way of saying that Moses "watered their flock" (v. 17), or an indication that the water they themselves drew was not enough, and Moses indeed had to draw more for them.

20 His daughters. Just as one's grandfather may be called "father" (as when Jacob says, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac," Gen. 32:10), granddaughters may be called "daughters." **Ask him in.** The text does not go on to say that they *did* ask him in, because this is obvious in any case.

[N] This comment is from the long commentary; for Ibn Ezra's view in the short commentary, see his comment to 3:1.

NJPS bread.” ²¹Moses consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife. ²²She bore a son whom he named Gershom, for he said, “I have been a stranger in a foreign land.”

²³A long time after that, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning under the bondage and cried out; and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to

RASHI 21 Moses consented. The Targum indicates that this is the correct translation. Midrashically, it is to be interpreted not from יאל, but from אלה, “swear”—he swore to him that he would not budge from Midian without his consent.

23 The king of Egypt died. He did not literally die; the Israelites would have rejoiced, not groaned, at his death. He was struck with leprosy, which is a kind of living death, and would slaughter Israelite children and bathe in their blood.

NAHMANIDES 23 A long time after that. Literally, “during those many days.”

One would expect it to say “after those many days.” Our Sages explain that the text calls them “many,” because it was a painful time that seemed interminable. In any case, the period in which **the king of Egypt died** and the Israelites cried out to God was actually quite short. We might rather explain “those many days” to refer to the whole period of slavery and oppression, which was long indeed. For the exile went on for a long time, and it was this that made the Israelites cry out. But in my opinion, the “many days” are the period in which Moses was on the run from Pharaoh. For in reality it was in his youth that he fled. He “went out to his kinsfolk” as soon as he was grown up, killed the Egyptian that very day, and fled the next day when it was reported. He must have been about 12 years old, as our Sages point out; he certainly could not have reached 20. And when he stood before Pharaoh, he was 80. So he must have been on the run for more than 60 years. It seems likely that he did not reach Midian and marry Zipporah until near the end of this period, for at this point in the story only one of their two children had been born. But nothing that needed telling occurred until this point. One who is on the run from the authorities does not linger in any one city, but flees in disguise “from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another” (Ps. 105:13). [I] At the end of this time, he came to Midian and stayed there (v. 15). One would have expected that verse to say “he arrived in the land of Midian,” as in the NJPS translation, but it really says “he settled in the land of Midian,” hinting that he had not settled in a city until he came to Midian at last and did so. As the text is written, it looks as if the whole sequence of events took place one after the other, within a single year, so this expression about “many days” serves to remind us that this is a brief description of quite a long period of time. Had it said “after many days,” that would have meant “many days after Moses settled in Midian,” which is not what the text wished to convey. **The king of Egypt died. The Israelites were groaning.** According to Rashi, he became leprous and would slaughter Jewish children and bathe in their blood. This is a midrash. The straightforward sense of the text is that all who are enslaved to an evil master look forward hopefully to the day of his death, but in this case they saw that the new king was more wicked than the first and, saying “Our bones are dried up, our hope is gone; we are doomed” (Ezek. 37:11), they “groaned with the groans of one struck down” (Ezek. 30:24).

[I] After his victory in the disputation with Christiani, Nahmanides himself was forced to flee his homeland.

could groan after the death of such a murderous king is an indication that the new king was even worse. I shall explain the implications of this verse further at 4:19.

[O] *The Book of Zerubbabel* is a description of the End of Days, probably written in the early 7th century, just before the advent of Islam. Eldad the Danite was a Jewish traveler of the late 9th century who claimed that his own tribe of Dan, together with those of Naphtali, Gad, and Asher, lived in an independent Jewish kingdom in Ethiopia, protected behind the legendary Sambatyon, an impassable river.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 23 A long time. A difficult time always seems long, a happy one short (Hizkuni). **The Israelites were groaning.** Since the evil decrees did not end with the death of the Pharaoh who had issued them, they foresaw no end to their suffering (Bekhor Shor).

OJPS him, that he may eat bread.” ²¹And Moses was content to dwell with the man; and he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter. ²²And she bore a son, and he called his name Gershom; for he said: “I have been a stranger in a strange land.”

²³And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of

וַיֹּאֲלֵם מֹשֶׁה לְשָׁכֵת אֶת־הָאִישׁ וַיִּתֵּן
אֶת־צִפּוֹרָה בְּתוּ לְמֹשֶׁה: ²²וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן
וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גֵּרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי
בְּאֶרֶץ נֹכְרִיָּה: פ

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָחֲזוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִן־הָעֲבָדָה
וַיַּעֲקֹוּ וַתֵּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why did Moses name his first son Gershom? According to the explanations of the names in Exod. 18:1-4, Eliezer (“God was my help”) should have been first, and only after God helped him could he escape to Midian and call himself “a stranger in a foreign land” (v. 22), which should have inspired the name of his second son. ♦ Why do the Israelites begin to groan about their bondage only after the death of the king of Egypt?

RASHBAM 22 In a foreign land. For this is the meaning of Gershom—*ger sham*, “a stranger there” in a distant land.

23 A long time after that. After Moses had killed the Egyptian and Pharaoh king of Egypt sought to kill him, and he fled, a long time had passed, until now he was 80 years old when the Holy One spoke with him. And now **the king** who had been seeking to kill him **died**. The Israelites had been groaning all this time, and the Holy One saw their affliction. At this point, Moses was “tending the flock” (3:1) and the Holy One appeared to him and commanded him to return to Egypt. Moses was afraid to do this until the Holy One informed him, “All the men who sought to kill you are dead” (4:19). It was Pharaoh who died. That is why our text says, **The king of Egypt died**—to set the stage for God’s remark in 4:19. Similarly Ham is called father of Canaan in Gen. 9:18 to set the stage for the curse of Canaan at the end of that chapter.

IBN EZRA 21 The man ... gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as wife. The verse seems to imply that it was Reuel, their grandfather, who did this; but perhaps Jethro was not there.

22 She bore him a son. It was Zipporah who was Moses’ “Cushite” wife (Num. 12:1); do not believe the legend in *The Chronicles of Moses* that he was King of Cush (Ethiopia) for 40 years and had a queen there. In general, no work that was not written either by prophets or by sages relying on tradition is to be relied on, all the more so when it contains matters that defy reason. I am referring to such works as *The Book of Zerubbabel*, Eldad the Danite’s book, and the like. [O] **Whom he named.** Whom Moses named.

23 The king of Egypt died. It was now safe for Moses to return to Egypt. Moreover, the Israelites had now repented of the idol worship that (according to Ezek. 20:5-7) they had practiced in Egypt. **The Israelites were groaning.** The fact that the Israelites

NJPS God. ²⁴God heard their moaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. ²⁵God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

3 Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed,

RASHI 25 God took notice of them. He turned His attention to them and did not hide His eyes from them.

3:1 Into the wilderness. So as not to steal by grazing the flock in pastures owned by others. **The mountain of God.** Moses was able to say this later, when he wrote the Torah; he did not know it at the time.

2 In a blazing fire. Literally, "in the heart of the fire." **Out of a bush.** And not out of some lofty tree, in accordance with God's assurance, "I will be with him in distress" (Ps. 91:15). While My people are enslaved, I, too, am in cramped quarters.

NAHMANIDES 25 God looked upon the Israelites and God took notice of them. Rashi's explanation is to be preferred to that of Ibn Ezra here. For at first God did hide His face from them, and they were "ready prey" (Deut. 31:17). Now God "looked upon them," which is to say that He no longer hid His face from them, but knew their pain and all that was being done to them and all that they needed. The text goes to great lengths to mention all the reasons why God should redeem them (see also 3:7), for despite the fact that the time decreed for their Egyptian slavery had expired, they were idolaters and unworthy of redemption, as is explained in Ezek. 20:5-10. But because of their crying out to Him, He mercifully accepted their prayer. But the True meaning of the text contains a great secret, one of the deep mysteries of the Torah: that their affliction rose up to the Light of His Countenance and He brought them near to Knowledge, as in "Oh, make them known in these years! Though angry, may You remember compassion" (Hab. 3:2). That is why the text goes on about this even after having said in v. 24 that God heard them and remembered His covenant. This verse is explained in *Sefer ha-Bahir*; [J] you can understand it from there.

3:2 An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire. Ibn Ezra's explanation (at vv. 4 and 7) that "God" refers to the angel is incorrect. For Moses, the great

[J] *Sefer ha-Bahir*, generally referred to by Nahmanides as *The Midrash of R. Nehunya b. ha-Kanah*, is a mystical work that appeared in southern France ca. 1200. It had a great influence in Spanish kabbalistic circles.

that God saw the slave labor that the Egyptians made them perform in public, and God knew their oppression of them in secret.

3:1 His father-in-law Jethro. In my opinion, Jethro is Zipporah's brother; see my comment to Num. 10:29. [P] **Horeb.** Mount Sinai; see Deuteronomy, where this is the standard name for Sinai. It is also found in Mal. 3:22. Etymologically, Horeb refers to the extreme dryness (*horeb*) of the location (for it is far from the Nile and so hot that no rain falls), and Sinai to the bush (*sneh*). **The mountain of God.** Moses knew this only later, when he wrote down the Torah.

2 A flame of fire. Rather, "in the heart of the fire." Following the standard interpretation, NJPS translates as if a *h* has dropped out of the word, and *labbah* is simply *lahabah* ("flame"). But this cannot be. For *h* is never a vowel letter except at the end of a word, and it

[P] In the long commentary, Ibn Ezra expresses a different view; see his comment to 2:18.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 25 God took notice of them. That is, God's providence cleaved to them, to get them out of Egypt before the scheduled time of redemption, because of His covenant with the Patriarchs. For divine providence continues after the good man into subsequent generations as long as his offspring preserve it (Gersonides).

3:1 His father-in-law Jethro the priest of Midian. When one is reduced in circumstances, it is better to be beholden to a great man than to a small one, and to a relative rather than to a stranger (Abarbanel). **Into the wilderness.** Rather, "beyond the wilderness," for in the wilderness there is no forage (Bekhor Shor). **Came to Horeb.** By himself, to be alone for purposes of prayer and reflection (Sforno). **The mountain of God.** So called because it was a place predisposed to have the divine emanation attach itself to Moses there. Alternatively, Moses might already have received prophecy there; or it may simply have meant "a God-almighty big mountain" (Gersonides).

2 An angel. Maimonides (*Guide* 2:6,41) says that Moses did not see an angel in the fire; the angel appeared to him as fire. But there are a number of arguments against this. For one, "God [i.e., the angel] called to him out of the bush" (v. 5). Are we supposed to think that

OJPS the bondage. ²⁴And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵And God saw the children of Israel, and God took cognizance of them.

הַעֲבֹדָה: ²⁴וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב: ²⁵וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים: ס

וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵנוּ כִּהְיוֹן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהֵג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הָר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵב: ²וַיֵּרָא מֶלֶאכֶךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Since God heard the Israelites' moaning, what further need is there to say afterward (v. 25) that "God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them"? ♦ Since this was Moses' first prophetic experience, when "an angel of the LORD" appeared to him (v. 2), why was he surprised at the bush not burning up, rather than at this more marvelous sight?

3 Now Moses was keeping the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock to the farthest end of the wilderness, and came to the mountain of God, unto Horeb. ²And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he

RASHBAM 24 God remembered His covenant. He remembered that He had promised the three Patriarchs that he would give them the land of Canaan. Now the end of the 400-year period that he had mentioned to Abraham in Gen. 15:13 was drawing near.

3:2 The bush was not consumed. Even at the very point where the flame came forth from the bush there was not a trace of burning. [E]

[E] Against the opinions of those who think "not consumed" means that the bush was not burnt up, Rashbam explains that it was not the slightest bit burnt.

IBN EZRA 24 God remembered. That is, He remembered that the preordained period of Israelite slavery (Gen. 15:13) was about to come to an end.

25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. More literally, "God saw ... and God knew." According to the philosophers, there are two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of what is existent, and knowledge of what exists only potentially. According to this view, God saw what had already been done to the Israelites, and God knew what was going to happen to them in the future. But the most plausible explanation of this verse is that the text is speaking about God in human terms. Similarly, 3:7 says, "I have heard their cry ... I know their pains." But some interpret our verse to mean