

מקראות גדולות

The

COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

EXODUS שמות

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Bekhor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

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NJPS ²God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to

OJPS ²And God spoke unto Moses, and said unto him: "I am the LORD; ³and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name

RASHI ² God spoke to Moses and said to him. He called him to account for his harsh question, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22). [A] The Sages have explained: When Moses asked God, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22) the Holy One said to him: What a pity that the Patriarchs are no more! How I mourn their deaths! I appeared to them many times as El Shaddai, and they never asked Me, "What is Your name?" But you said to Me, "When they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (3:13). When Abraham wanted to bury Sarah, he could not even find a grave for her without paying cold cash for it (Genesis 23). Isaac faced contention over the wells that he dug (Gen. 26:18–20). Jacob, too, had to buy a piece of land to pitch his tent (Gen. 33:19). And not one of them questioned My behavior! Yet here you are saying, "Why did You bring harm upon this people?" (5:22). — But this midrash is not consistent with the biblical text, for a number of reasons. First, the text does not say, "They did not ask My name LORD." Second, He did indeed reveal that Name to Abram, at the covenant between the pieces: "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to assign this land to you as a possession" (Gen. 15:7). Third, in what way would it make sense to follow such a complaint by saying "I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites" (v. 5)? So I say the text is most coherent when interpreted in a way that works in context, "a word fitly spoken" (Prov. 25:11). Let the midrash be told anyway, as it says, "Behold, My word is like fire—declares the LORD—and like a hammer that shatters rock!" (Jer. 23:29)—interpreting a verse is like a hammer striking rock: it creates many sparks. **And said to him, I am the LORD.** I faithfully reward those who follow Me. I did not send you for nothing, but to fulfill My promise to the Patriarchs. — We find in a number of places that the expression "I am the LORD" indicates that God can be relied on, whether to punish (e.g., Lev. 19:12) or to reward (e.g., Lev. 22:31). I have heard something similar from R. Baruch b. Eliezer [B], who brought me a proof from the following verse: "Assuredly, I will teach them, once and for all I will teach them My power and My might. And they shall learn that My name is LORD" (Jer. 16:21). We learn from this that even when the Holy One fulfills words of retribution, He makes known that His name is LORD—how much the more so when He is fulfilling a promise of reward.

3 I appeared to the Patriarchs as El Shaddai. I made a promise to each of them, and

[A] Rashi is explaining why the text is "God spoke and said," not just "God said." [B] He is otherwise unknown.

NAHMANIDES ^{6:3} But I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה. See Rashi's comment. What he meant by it is that the fulfillment of the promise had not yet been made known. For the *time* of fulfillment of the promise had not yet arrived in any case. But his explanation would require changing the verb so that the verse would read either "I did not make known to them My name YHWH" or "My name YHWH was not known to them." Perhaps he understood the phrase to mean (following the Hebrew word order reflected in OJPS), "My name is YHWH, but I did not make Myself known to them" by that name. The English translations follow Ibn Ezra. What the text really means is that God appeared to the Patriarchs as El Shaddai, the name by which He can overcome astrological forces and perform miracles that are great but do not upset the natural order of things. "In famine He redeemed them from death, in war, from the sword" (Job 5:20). He gave them wealth, honor, and every good thing. They were like all the assurances in the Torah with regard to blessings and curses. For reward for observing the commandments and punishment for transgressions both come through miraculous means. For if man was left to his nature, or to his astrological fate, his deeds would neither help nor hurt him. But in this world, reward and punishment for everything commanded in the Torah is miraculous but hidden. A neutral observer would see them as natural events, when in truth they are the man's reward or punishment. That is why the Torah goes on at length about the promises that apply to this world, but does not explain the spiritual promises that apply to the world of souls. For the promises that apply to this world are in fact supernatural, but the survival of the soul and its cleaving to God are natural, since by rights it

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ^{6:2} God spoke. This expression appears only two other places in the entire Bible: "God spoke to Noah" (Gen. 8:15) and, at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, "God spoke all these words" (20:1) (Masorah). **I am the LORD.** I told you that you would be "God" to Pharaoh, but don't misunderstand: I am the real God (Hizkuni). And as such I not only created the world, but keep it in existence (Sforno).

3 Shaddai. Saadia is correct that the name means "the one [who said] 'Enough' [to the world]." The use of the relative pronoun *sha-* is comparable to that of *asher* in Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh (3:14). The name may refer to God's telling the heavens at the beginning of creation that they had spread far enough and/or to His own existence being sufficient (Abarbanel). **My name יהוה.** "I appeared ... as El Shaddai,

וַיִּדְבֶּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה: ³וַיֹּאֲרָא אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יִצְחָק

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why does God introduce Himself to Moses (v. 2) again? ♦ Why does He both "speak" and "say"? ♦ If this "God" was indeed the angel of 3:2, how can he say, "I am the LORD"? ♦ How can God say (v. 3) that the Patriarchs did not know Him as LORD, when Gen. 15:7 and many other verses testify that He spoke with them many times under that Name?

RASHBAM ² God spoke to Moses. In Egypt. [A] **I am the LORD.** And the definition of My name is that I have the power to keep My promise.

3 As El Shaddai. The revelation of this name was a promise for the future, which I have not yet kept. **By My name יהוה.** NJPS has moved this from its original place in the verse, and both English translations have added "by," which is not in the Hebrew. It

[A] Probably this means that Moses did not have to leave the realm of idolatry in order to communicate with God; contrast Rashi's comment to 9:29.

IBN EZRA ² God spoke to Moses. The angel spoke to him, as agent of the LORD. **I am the LORD.** I have sent you to make known My honored name. For **I did not make Myself known** to the Patriarchs by it, as they deserved. — Everyone acknowledged God (even Pharaoh, as I shall explain in my comments to 8:15), but not all even of the Israelites knew that the LORD was God. Thus God tells Moses "I am the LORD" to prepare him to tell the Israelites this in v. 6.

3 I appeared. In visions of the night. **Shaddai.** This is a difficult word to explain. R. Saadia understands it to mean *sha-dai* ("that [said] 'enough' [to the world]"). But I do not see how "that enough" can be a name. Rather, "Shaddai" must be an adjective; it has the same vowel pattern as *davvai* ("sick") in Jer. 8:18. Samuel ha-Nagid derives it from שרד, "to destroy," taking it to mean "strong and victorious," and this explains it well. **But I did not make Myself known ... by My name יהוה.** Ibn Janah, following the Hebrew word order (see OJPS), interprets it as an oath: "By My name YHWH! I did not make Myself known to them as I have to you." The word "but," however, cannot be interpreted as introducing

NJPS them by My name יהוה. ⁴I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which

OJPS YHWH I made Me not known to them. ⁴And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of

RASHI each time I told them, "I am El Shaddai." [C] **But I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.** It does not say, "I did not make this name known to them," but "I did not make *Myself* known to them" by that Name. That is, I did not make Myself known to them in My aspect of utter truthfulness and reliability, which is represented by the Tetragrammaton. For I made them these promises but did not fulfill them.

4 I also established My covenant with them. Even though I appeared to them as [C] See Rashi's comment to v. 4.

NAHMANIDES should "return to God Who bestowed it" (Eccles. 12:7). I will say more about this later, with God's help.

God, then, told Moses: I showed Myself to the Patriarchs in the power by which I manipulate the constellations and help my chosen ones. But by My name YHWH—the name by which all that exists has its being—I did not make Myself known to them. That is, I did not alter nature and create new things for them. "Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD" (v. 6). Inform them once more of the great Name, for by it I will work wonders for them. Let them know that "I the LORD do all these things" (Isa. 45:7). And everything that Ibn Ezra said on this topic is correct. But he is like one who prophesies without realizing what he is saying. For he has not explained the change from "appeared" to "make known." He could explain this as follows: God specifically says **I appeared** to the Patriarchs because their prophecy was all received in night visions. But that of Moses was received face to face. So **I did not make Myself known to them** as I have to you.

The True meaning of this text is what it literally says in context: I appeared to them through the lens of El Shaddai, following what God says in Num. 12:6, "When a prophet of the LORD arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream." But I did not make Myself known to them, for they did not look through the clear glass to be able to know Me like Moses, the one "whom the LORD singled out, face to face" (Deut. 34:10). The Patriarchs knew YHWH, but not through prophecy. So when Abraham spoke with God, he would use the word "Lord" (e.g., Gen. 18:32) or the combination "Lord GOD" (e.g., Gen. 15:2), [A] not the Tetragrammaton alone.

What it means is that the Shekhinah was revealed to the Patriarchs, and there was divine speech with them through a weakened form of God's attribute of justice, and that is how He dealt with them. But He dealt with Moses, and was known to him, through His attribute of mercy, which is indicated by His great Name, the Tetragrammaton—as Isaiah says, "Who made His glorious arm march at the right hand of Moses ... Thus did You shepherd Your people to win for Yourself a glorious name" (Isa. 63:12,14). Therefore Moses does not use the name El Shaddai in the Torah from this point on, for the Torah was given through His great Name—"I the LORD am your God" (20:2). [B] "From the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; on earth He let you see His great fire" (Deut. 4:36). I have already hinted at the meaning of "the heavens." [C] May the Holy One open our eyes and show us wonders from His Torah.

[A] That is, the word "Lord" followed by the Tetragrammaton. [B] This is the beginning of the Ten Commandments, the moment at which the Torah was considered to be given to Israel. [C] See his comment to Gen. 1:8.

grammaton? There is no doubt that the Patriarchs knew this name. They merely did not know that this name, like Shaddai, was descriptive as well as being a name. And now I will reveal to you something of the mystery of "El Shaddai." We know that there is an intermediary world between the upper world of the Lord and our lower world. Because the natural place of the human soul is above the intermediary world, if it is wise enough to abandon the pleasures of the lower world and cleave to God, God can extricate it from the fate determined for it astrologically in the intermediary world of the stars. Thus God tells Abram, "I am El Shaddai.... I will make you exceedingly numerous" (Gen. 17:1-2), overcoming the childlessness that had been determined for him astrologically. "The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm" (Gen. 48:16) of whom Jacob spoke played a similar role. As I shall explain in my comments to 20:1 and 33:23, cleaving to God in order to overcome one's predetermined fate is the mystery underlying the entire Torah. The Patriarchs did not achieve this cleaving to God to the same degree as did Moses, who knew God face to face. This is what enabled Moses to alter the course of nature and perform miracles, which the Patriarchs could not do. In context, "I am the LORD" is the answer to Moses' question of 5:22, "Why did You send me?"—"I sent you to make this name known throughout the world, just as I sent the Patriarchs to make known My name El Shaddai."

4 I also established My covenant. I have also sent you because I swore **to give them**—or to their offspring, who are considered like them—**the land of Canaan.**

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS and My name YHWH." Note that the cantillation marks suggest a separation between this phrase and the following phrase, **I did not make Myself known to them** (Bekhor Shor). To them—to Israel. God's name is His self, and His self is His name (Gersonides). But I must make it known to the Israelites before they can become My people (Sforno).

וְאֵל-יְעֻקֵב בָּאֵל שְׁדַי וְשֵׁם יְהוָה לֹא נִדְעֵתִי לָהֶם; + וְגַם הִקְמֵתִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ How are the establishing of the covenant (v. 4) and hearing the meaning of the Israelites (v. 5) connected with God's Name?

RASHBAM must rather be interpreted "but My name is YHWH." [B] That is, I appeared to them as El Shaddai, but the essence of My name is YHWH. **I did not make Myself known to them.** This is a repetition of the previous statement: I did not reveal Myself to them as the essence of My name, but only as El Shaddai. But to you I have revealed the essence of My name—Ehyeh—and My appellation—YHWH. [C] And in your time I will fulfill My promise "to give them the land of Canaan" (v. 4). To repeat: the verse does not say (as it might have), "My name YHWH I did not make known to them." What it says is this: "I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but My name is YHWH. I did not make Myself known to them."

[B] These are the English letters corresponding to the four Hebrew letters of the Tetragrammaton, God's personal name, as printed in the translations. [C] See his comment to 3:15.

IBN EZRA an oath in Hebrew, as it does in Arabic. Grammatically, the "as" of "as El Shaddai" applies to "My name YHWH" as well (see the translations, where it is translated as "by" the second time). Saadia explains it to mean that the Patriarchs knew God as El Shaddai, and not *only* as YHWH. But there is no need for this nicety, since we know that YHWH and El Shaddai are one and the same, and there is no distinction between them, except that Shaddai is always descriptive and YHWH is sometimes descriptive and sometimes a proper noun, as I have pointed out in my note to 3:15. After all, God explicitly tells Abram, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans" (Gen. 15:7), and tells Jacob, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac" (Gen. 28:13). Jeshua b. Judah thinks that the Patriarchs did not know the Tetragrammaton, which was put into their stories by Moses when he wrote the Torah. But this is incorrect. How could Moses do this and subsequently write that the Patriarchs did not know the Tetra-

NJPS they lived as sojourners. ⁵I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. ⁷And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the

OJPS Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned. ⁵And moreover I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Wherefore say unto the children of Israel: I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; ⁷and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God,

RASHI El Shaddai, I also made a covenant between Myself and them to give them the land of Canaan. To Abraham, in the passage that establishes the covenant of circumcision: "When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, 'I am El Shaddai. Walk in My ways and be blameless.... I assign the land you sojourn in to you and your offspring to come, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting holding. I will be their God'" (Gen. 17:1,8). To Isaac: "Reside in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; I will assign all these lands to you and to your heirs, fulfilling the oath that I swore to your father Abraham" (Gen. 26:3). [D] And the same oath I swore to Abraham as El Shaddai, I swore to Jacob: "I am El Shaddai. Be fertile and increase; a nation, yea an assembly of nations, shall descend from you. Kings shall issue from your loins. The land that I assigned to Abraham and Isaac I assign to you; and to your offspring to come will I assign the land" (Gen. 35:11-12). So you see, I made a vow to them that I have not yet fulfilled.

אַתֶּם לַתְּתֵן לָהֶם אֶת־אֶרֶץ פְּנִיעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר־גָּרוּ בָּהֶּ: ⁵ וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נִאֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מֵעַבְדֵי אֲתָם וְאָזָר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי: ⁶ לָכֵן אֶמַר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְהוָה וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתָם וְנָאֲלַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזֶרְעוֹ נְטוּיָה וּבִשְׁפָטִים גְּדֹלִים: ⁷ וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why the triple description—"free," "deliver," and "redeem"—of the same thing (v. 6)? ♦ How does what was said previously lead "therefore" to this redemption?

IBN EZRA 5 I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites. Indicating that they have repented; this is still another reason why I have sent you.

6 Therefore. Just as I remain in existence, so does My word. **An outstretched arm.** Outstretched from heaven to earth.

7 I will take you to be My people. When you accept the Torah at Mount Sinai. **Your God who freed you.** Though their

5 I have now—being obligated to fulfill the covenant I established—**heard the moaning of the Israelites** who are moaning because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered that same covenant. For at the covenant between the pieces I told Abram, "I will execute judgment on the nation they shall serve" (Gen. 15:14).

6 Say, therefore, in accordance with that oath, **to the Israelite people: I am the LORD.** Use the Name that indicates that my promise is reliable. **I will free you.** For that is what I promised: "In the end they shall go free with great wealth" (Gen. 15:14). **The labors of the Egyptians.** Literally, from "under" the labors of the Egyptians—that is, their burdens, both literally and figuratively.

[D] God does not use the name El Shaddai here, but we can deduce that Isaac knew it in connection with the promise of the land from what he said to Jacob. "May El Shaddai bless you, make you fertile and numerous, so that you become an assembly of peoples. May He grant the blessing of Abraham to you and your offspring, that you may possess the land where you are sojourning, which God assigned to Abraham" (Gen. 28:3). This and the two verses in Rashi's comment are the only three places where "Shaddai" appears before the story of Joseph.

NAHMANIDES 4-5 I also established My covenant with them. That is, I appeared to them as El Shaddai and also established for them this covenant with Me. And I have now, as YHWH, heard the moaning of the Israelites ... and I have remembered My covenant that I established with them. A word to the wise is sufficient. [D] Now with regard to the midrash quoted by Rashi (in his comment to v. 2) about the Patriarchs never questioning His behavior or asking Him for His name: In fact, this midrash is quite consistent with the biblical text. The difficulty that prompted the Sages to create this midrash is the idea that the text would introduce a comment about the prophetic level of the Patriarchs only to belittle them and to say that God appeared to them "only" as El Shaddai. What would be the point of this? This text could just as well have begun with v. 6. So the Sages interpret vv. 2-5 as reproof to Moses, to tell him, "The Patriarchs, whose level of prophecy did not approach yours, and who knew Me only as El Shaddai, believed Me. I established My covenant with them, and I heard the moaning of their children on their account. But you, who know Me by My great Name, by which I made My promise to you, how much the more should you rely on My mercy, and promise the Israelites in My name that I will work signs and wonders with them." This too is reasonable and correct.

6 I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians. He promises them that He will bring them out of the Egyptians' land so that they need no longer bear their heavy burdens. **Deliver you from their bondage.** They will be completely out from under the Egyptians' control, not owing them any tribute. **I will redeem you.** He will perform extraordinary chastisements on the Egyptians until they say, "Go, Israel, as a ransom for our lives!" For "redemption" implies a monetary transaction. **With an outstretched arm.** His arm will be stretched out over them until He brings them out.

7 I will take you to be My people. When you come to Mount Sinai and accept the Torah, "you shall be My treasured possession" (19:5). [D] Nahmanides is hinting at a Kabbalistic interpretation.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 5 I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites. Even before My name was known to them. Even then I tried to extend My providence to them and fulfill My covenant with them. How much the more are they worthy of My providence now that My name is known to them! (Gersonides).

6 Say, therefore. For these three reasons: because I wish to take them for My people, because I made a covenant with their ancestors, and because I have heard their moaning (Sforno). **I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians.** From the day the plagues begin, your servitude will be lightened (Sforno). **Extraordinary chastisements.** Pharaoh would have let them go immediately had I wished him to: "Like channeled water is the mind of the king in the LORD's hand; He directs it to whatever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). But I wish to revenge Myself on him for enslaving them (Bekhor Shor).

7 I will take you to be My people. Better that you be slaves to Me than to Pharaoh (Bekhor Shor). **I, the LORD, am your God who**

NJPS LORD, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. "I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession, I the LORD." "But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.

¹⁰The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹"Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land." ¹²But Moses appealed to the LORD, saying,

RASHI 8 I swore. With OJPS, "I lifted up My hand"—to swear by My throne.

9 They would not listen to Moses. They took no consolation from what he said. [E] Their spirits crushed. One's spirit is one's "wind." One who is in distress is short of breath, and can hardly draw his lungs full of air.

12 How then should Pharaoh heed me? This one of the 10 biblical examples of

[E] "They would not listen" often means "they would not obey"; but here Moses was not asking them to do anything, merely trying to reassure them.

NAHMANIDES You shall know that I, the LORD, am your God who freed you

from the labors of the Egyptians. According to Ibn Ezra, the conjunction of Israel's stars decreed that they should remain in exile. But that is not the intent of this section, which merely says: When I redeem you with an outstretched arm that all the nations see, you will know that I am the Lord who creates new wonders in the world, and I am your God and have done all this for you, for you are "the LORD's portion" (Deut. 32:9).

8 I swore. Rashi takes the literal "I lifted up My hand" to indicate that God is putting His hand on His throne; Ibn Ezra, citing Deut. 32:40 and Dan. 12:7, takes it as metaphoric. But the True meaning is, "I have lifted up My hand of power to Myself that I will give you the land." [E] But the Daniel verse cited by Ibn Ezra has nothing to do with this topic; it refers not to God but to the angel "clothed in linen," who swears by "the Ever-Living One."

9 Their spirits crushed. Not that they did not believe in God or his prophet, but that they would not listen because their spirits were crushed, like that of a man so crushed by his toil that he does not want to live an extra minute in pain, even though he knows that he will eventually get some relief. What crushed their spirits was the fear that Pharaoh would kill them, as the foremen told Moses (5:21). **Cruel bondage.** This refers to the pressure the taskmasters were putting on them (5:13), not giving them a moment to think.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying. The commentators have said that throughout the Torah this word "saying"—literally, "to say"—always indicates something that is to be said to the Israelites. But here it is something to be said to Pharaoh. In Gen. 31:29, it introduces something that is not to be said at all! Moreover, in many places the speech to Israel is made explicit anyway (e.g., 7:8-9, Lev. 18:1-2, Num. 15:37-38, Deut. 1:9). In 7:9, "When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, 'Show a wonder for you,'" it cannot mean "saying to someone else." In my opinion the word is always used to indicate a full, clear, complete expression—not a doubtful or allusive one. This explains why it is so common in the Torah, for God spoke with Moses "mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles" (Num. 12:8). [F]

12 The Israelites would not listen to me. Because you did not make my words ones they could listen to. **How then should**

[E] Nahmanides adds here an interpretation of Deut. 32:40 whose meaning is unclear. [F] Nahmanides understands "saying" as a form of the infinitive absolute, used in Biblical Hebrew to add emphasis to a verb. (Though this form ordinarily precedes the other verb, he points out that it can sometimes come afterward, as in Jer. 23:17.) Modern scholars understand "saying" as indicating the beginning of a direct quotation, the equivalent of our quotation marks.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS freed you. And you will serve me willingly, saying, "Better to serve the Great King than a commoner like that Pharaoh!" (Bekhor Shor).

9 Moses told this to the Israelites. Without Aaron's help, as commanded in v. 6 (Gersonides). They would not listen to Moses. For which reason the promise of v. 8, "I will bring you into the land," was fulfilled not for them, but for their children (Sforno). Their spirits crushed. Rather, with Ps. 78:8, their "spirit was not true to God" because the **cruel bondage** prevented them from thinking about what Moses had said (Sforno).

11 Go and tell Pharaoh. Without Aaron's help—prompting Moses' appeal in v. 12 (Gersonides).

12 The Israelites would not listen to me. Moses did not realize that they did not listen because their spirits had been crushed (Hizkuni).

OJPS who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. "And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for a heritage: I am the LORD." "And

Moses spoke so unto the children of Israel; but they hearkened not unto Moses for impatience of spirit, and for cruel bondage.

¹⁰And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: ¹¹"Go in, speak unto Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land." ¹²And Moses spoke before the LORD, saying: "Behold, the

RASHBAM 9 They would not listen to Moses. They would not listen to him now, even though earlier "the people were convinced" (4:31). For they had expected to get some rest from their hard labor, but now the work was harder than ever.

IBN EZRA astrological fate at that point was to remain in exile, as I shall explain in my comments to 33:21.

8 I swore. NJPS understands the more literal "I lifted up My hand" (OJPS) correctly as a metaphor; see "Lo, I raise My hand to heaven" (Deut. 32:40) and "He lifted his right hand and his left hand to heaven" (Dan. 12:7). I will bring you into the land. That is, you or your children. [A] Some say it was a conditional promise, but this is unnecessary. For many of those who left Egypt were under 20 years old and did enter the land, along with the children of those who died in the wilderness. For only those 20 or older were condemned to die in the wilderness.

9 They would not listen. It is not that they would not believe him, but that they literally would not listen, their spirits crushed by the length of the exile and by the increasingly **cruel bondage** that had been imposed on them.

10 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying. To him. [B]

11 Go. To the palace.

12 The Israelites, who are Your people, would not listen to me; how then should

[A] Eventually, this generation of Israelites died in the wilderness; it was the next generation that was brought into the land of Canaan. [B] See Nahmanides' comment.

וידעתם כי אני יהוה אלהיכם המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים: 8 והבאתי אתכם אל-הארץ אשר נשאתי את-ידי לתת אותה לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב ונתתי אותה לכם מורשה אני יהוה: 9 וידבר משה בן אל-בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל-משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה: פ

10 וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: 11 בא דבר אל-פרעה מלך מצרים וישלח את-בני-ישראל מארצו: 12 וידבר משה לפני

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ What sense is there in Moses' syllogism (v. 12)? The Israelites would not listen to him because their spirits were crushed (v. 9), but this was not true of Pharaoh!

NJPS king of Egypt to free the Israelites from the Egyptians; these are the same Moses and Aaron. ²⁸For when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt ²⁹and the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I will tell you," ³⁰Moses appealed to the LORD, saying, "See, I am of impeded speech; how then should Pharaoh heed me!"

7 The LORD replied to Moses, "See, I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aaron as your prophet. ²You shall repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall

RASHI same" implies that their righteousness in performing their assignment from God remained "the same" from beginning to end.

28 For when the LORD spoke. This verse is the first half of a sentence that is continued in v. 29. [H]

29 The LORD said to Moses. This verse is a repetition of v. 11. The text resumes after the interruption of the genealogical information by repeating it. **I am the LORD.** I am competent to send you and to carry out the things I sent you to say.

30 Moses appealed to the LORD. This is the repetition of v. 12. Such "repetitive resumption" is standard. It is like a man saying to his friend, "Now let's return to the original subject."

7:1 I place you in the role of God to Pharaoh. Judge and chastiser, to chastise him with blows and suffering. **As your prophet.** Following Onkelos, "as your interpreter." Such is the biblical prophet: one who announces words of rebuke to the people. Etymologically *navi*, "prophet," comes from the verb *nuv*, "to bear fruit," as used in Isa. 57:19 and Prov. 10:31. [I]

2 You shall repeat. You shall repeat each message once, exactly as you heard it from [H] The comma in the translations makes this clear. Rashi emphasizes the point because the traditional Hebrew text inserts a break at this point, even though it is the middle of a sentence. [I] This is no longer considered accurate.

NAHMANIDES **28 When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.** It may be that this is not the first half of a sentence that continues in v. 29, but the end of the sentence that begins in v. 27. OJPS makes this possibility somewhat clearer: "These are that Moses and Aaron. And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt." ("That" at the beginning of v. 29 in OJPS is not in the Hebrew.) Vv. 26-27 might lead one to think that God spoke equally to both Aaron and Moses; v. 28 makes clear that God spoke to Moses and that it was only the command to bring the Israelites out of Egypt that applied equally to both Aaron and Moses. This would account for the division between the *aliyot* being made at the end of v. 28.

29 I am the LORD. See my comment to v. 13.

7:2 You shall repeat. Rashi's comment is completely wrong.

appearance of an angel. [I] And Aaron will be the prophet. This is the response to Moses' fear (6:30) that Pharaoh would not listen to him. God speaks to the prophet, and the prophet to the people. Those who say that *navi*, "prophet," comes from the verb *nuv* ("to bear fruit"), as in Isa. 57:19, are incorrect. For *nuv* is biconsonantal (in the terminology of the French grammarians) or hollow (in the terminology of the Spanish), but *navi* is from the triconsonantal root נבא.

2 You shall repeat to Aaron all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh. When Moses goes to [I] But our case is even more surprising, since the division between the 2nd and 3rd *aliyot* actually occurs in the middle of a sentence. [I] The long commentary explains somewhat less extravagantly, "I have raised you so high that in Pharaoh's eyes you will be considered on the level of an angel."

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **28 When the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.** This was the moment when Moses was given prophetic precedence over Aaron, as the arrangement of their names shows. That is why the break between sections occurs after this verse. For the section breaks undoubtedly derive from Moses by divine inspiration (Abarbanel).

30 I am of impeded speech. God's instruction in v. 29, "Speak to Pharaoh," made Moses think that his association with Aaron was only for speaking to Israel. Hence he repeated this argument to God (Abarbanel).

OJPS that spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the children of Israel from Egypt. These are that Moses and Aaron. ²⁸And it came to pass on the day when the LORD spoke unto Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹that the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: "I am the LORD; speak thou unto Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I speak unto thee." ³⁰And Moses said before the LORD: "Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?"

7 And the LORD said unto Moses: "See, I have set thee in God's stead to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. ²Thou shalt speak all that I command thee; and Aaron thy brother shall

RASHBAM precedence. But v. 26, following the genealogy, lists them in birth order, with Aaron taking precedence.

30 How then should Pharaoh heed me? Vv. 29-30 repeat vv. 11-12, which introduce the topic but cut it short in order to include the genealogy introducing Moses and Aaron before they speak to Pharaoh.

7:1 Your prophet. Your spokesman.

IBN EZRA God, while Aaron was merely a prophet; as God says, "When a prophet of the LORD arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses" (Num. 12:6-7). Notice that Aaron twice refers to Moses as "my lord" (32:22; Num. 12:11). From this point on, you will not find the expression "Aaron and Moses" anywhere in the Torah, the Prophets, or the Writings, except when their genealogy is discussed (Num. 3:1 and 26:59; 1 Chron. 5:29 and 23:13).

28 For when ... It is amazing that the editor of the text separated this verse from v. 29, when (as the translations show) the two verses clearly make up a single sentence. The same phenomenon occurs at Deut. 2:16-17. [I] Perhaps the paragrapher had a reason for doing so, his intellect being more expansive than ours.

30 See, I am of impeded speech. Some think that Moses said this to God twice (see v. 12), but that God did not answer him (7:1) until he repeated it. But in fact v. 30 picks up the story at the point of interruption.

7:1 In the role of God. With the ap-

NJPS speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt. ⁴When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt with extraordinary chastisements. ⁵And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand

OJPS speak unto Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land. ³And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴But Pharaoh will not hearken unto you, and I will lay My hand upon Egypt, and bring forth My hosts, My people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt, by great judgments. ⁵And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I

וְאֶהְרֵן אֹחֶיךָ יִדְבֵר אֶל-פְּרֹעֹה וְשַׁלַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ: 3 וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת-לֵב פְּרֹעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת-אֹתוֹתַי וְאֶת-מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: 4 וְלֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵכֶם פְּרֹעֹה וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-יָדֵי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-צְבָאוֹתַי אֶת-עַמִּי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּשִׁפְטִים גְּדוֹלִים: 5 וְיָדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּנֹטְתִי אֶת-יָדִי עַל-מִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל

RASHBAM 5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. Their lord and ruler. For up to this point their attitude was, "I do not know the LORD" (5:2).

IBN EZRA Pharaoh, even if Aaron is not mentioned we know that they always went together.

3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. Many have wondered how Pharaoh can be considered to have sinned if God hardened his heart. Some great minds reply that what God did was to strengthen Pharaoh's ability to bear his troubles. [K] My answer is that God gives man wisdom and plants within his heart the intelligence to receive a higher power that enables him to increase his pleasure, or to lessen his pain. I will explain this further in my comments to 33:23 and Deut. 5:26.

4 My hand. My blows, which (among humans) are given with the hand. My ranks. Saadia believes that "Hosts" in the term "LORD of Hosts" refers to Israel; note the OJPS "My hosts" here. But I believe it refers to the "hosts of heaven." Just as the angels are God's ranks in heaven, the Israelites are His ranks on earth.

5 The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. The purpose of the blows to be inflicted is to spread His fame throughout the world.

[K] In the long commentary, this opinion is attributed to Jeshua b. Judah, and is rejected. The short commentary adds no more at this point than the citation to Deuteronomy.

RASHI My mouth, and your brother Aaron shall articulate it elegantly in Pharaoh's ears.

3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart. Because he has spoken disdainfully [I] of Me, and it is clear to Me that gentiles take no satisfaction in wholehearted repentance, it is best that his heart be hardened in order that I might perform many wonders against him, so you Israelites will recognize My might. — Such is God's method: He punishes the other nations so that Israel will heed and fear Him. Thus it says, "I wiped out nations.... And I thought that [Jerusalem] would fear Me, would learn a lesson" (Zeph. 3:6-7). Nonetheless, for the first five plagues the text says not "The LORD stiffened Pharaoh's heart" but "Pharaoh's heart stiffened."

4 My hand. Literally—to strike them with it.

[I] The translation "disdainfully" assumes that Rashi is thinking of "Who is the LORD that I should heed Him?" (5:2). Some commentators think Rashi meant that Pharaoh spoke "confrontationally" when he boasted, "The Nile is mine, and I made it" (Ezek. 29:9).

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ As readers of this text have asked from the very beginning—if God hardened Pharaoh's heart (v. 3), what was his sin? ♦ How is v. 4 anything other than a repetition of v. 3?

NAHMANIDES **3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart.** According to Exodus Rabbah, God here reveals to Moses that He intends to harden Pharaoh's heart in order to give him the punishment he deserves for having enslaved the Israelites so harshly. The midrash adds: "I have hardened his heart" (10:1). R. Johanan said: This gives heretics an opening to say that he had no opportunity to repent. R. Simeon b. Lakish said: The heretics can just shut up. 'At scoffers He scoffs' (Prov. 3:34). God warns a man once, twice, even thrice, and he does not repent? At that point, God locks the door of repentance on him in order to punish him for his sin. Thus it was with Pharaoh the wicked. The Holy One messaged him five times, [I] and he paid no attention. The Holy One said to him: You have stiffened your neck and hardened your heart; now I will add uncleanness to your own uncleanness."

This midrash answers the question that everyone asks. If God hardened his heart, what was his sin? There are two explanations for it, and both are true. One is that Pharaoh, having done such evil to Israel for no reason, deserved to have the way of repentance blocked to him, as is shown by numerous verses both in the Torah and in the rest of the Bible, and was being punished for his original deeds. The second explanation is that half the plagues against him—those where it is not said that "God hardened Pharaoh's heart" but that "Pharaoh became stubborn" (and the like)—were indeed justified, by his refusal to honor God by letting the Israelites go. But when the plagues grew worse and he could no longer stand them, his heart softened, and he was convinced to let them go—but by the severity of the plagues, not to do the will of his Creator. It was at that point that God hardened his spirit and toughened his heart, "in order that His fame might resound throughout the world" (9:16). "Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations" (Ezek. 38:23). When God says already before the plagues, "I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go" (4:21), He is informing Moses of what he is going to do in the last five plagues. God, after all, already knows that Pharaoh will refuse to let them go until he is forced (3:19). And indeed, in the last five plagues, and also at the splitting of the sea, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. "Like channeled water is the mind of the king in the LORD's hand; He directs it to whatever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1).

[I] With the first five plagues.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS **7:3 I will harden Pharaoh's heart.** The moral question is posed even more sharply in the case of Sihon in Deut. 2:30: "King Sihon of Heshbon refused to let us pass through, because the LORD had stiffened his will and hardened his heart in order to deliver him into your power." There are three answers to the question of why Pharaoh was not allowed to repent: (1) Pharaoh and the Egyptians still deserved punishment for what they did to Israel; (2) the availability of repentance is a grace given by God specifically to Israel, the nation that is under his particular providence; (3) but the most correct answer is simply that God did not (God forbid!) harden Pharaoh's heart directly, but indirectly by inflicting plagues upon him and then removing them, letting Pharaoh think that they were therefore not from God (Abarbanel). Since Pharaoh would undoubtedly have let the Israelites go immediately simply because he could not bear the plagues, God hardened his heart for two purposes: first, to give the Egyptians an opportunity for repentance, and second, so that Israel should see and fear the Lord, and so that "you may recount in the hearing of your sons and of your sons' sons how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them—in order that you may know that I am the LORD" (10:2). Had Pharaoh sincerely wanted to repent, nothing would have prevented it (Sforno).

NJPS over Egypt and bring out the Israelites from their midst." "This Moses and Aaron did; as the LORD commanded them, so they did. "Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three, when they made their demand on Pharaoh.

"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, 'Produce your marvel,' you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.' It shall turn into a serpent." "So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as the LORD had commanded: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent. "Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men

RASHI 9 **Marvel.** A sign to prove that the one who sends you has power. A **serpent.** A snake.

11 By their spells. The Hebrew word *b'lahateihem* is unique, occurring only here

NAHMANIDES 11 **The wise men.** The wise men were the leaders and the elders, those who were "wise" in conjuring and summoning demons. **The Egyptian magicians.** The term includes both the "wise men" and the "sorcerers." The etymology of the Hebrew word is unknown; see the comment of Ibn Ezra. But Rashi's suggestion (in his comment to Gen. 41:8) that it is Aramaic for "necromancers," those who work themselves into a frenzy by using the

deny knowing the Lord; only now would he demand a marvel, requiring Aaron's involvement. [L]

9 Take your rod. A number of intelligent commentators are under the mistaken impression that there are three rods, but there is just one, referred to in different ways, depending on the context. It is called "the rod of God" (4:20) because of the signs that God showed Moses with it, not (as some say) because the name of God was carved on it. The rod itself had no intrinsic power; after all, even though Moses stretched it out to begin the plague of locusts (10:13), the locusts did not actually come until God drove them in with the east wind. The same thing happened at the splitting of the sea (14:21). With the plagues of the animal swarms, pestilence, boils, and the slaying of the first-born, there is no mention of the rod at all, nor with the appearance of the manna, which involved 10 miracles all by itself. It is referred to as Moses' rod (e.g., in 9:23, "Moses held out his rod toward the sky") because Moses performed the signs with it. The same applies whether Moses is performing an "upper" sign, holding his arm out toward the sky (presumably in 10:22, for the plague of darkness, he is holding the rod as he did for the others) or a "lower" one, holding the rod over the land or sea. And it is called Aaron's rod because of the signs performed by him at God's command to Moses. Note that the same rod is associated both with Moses and with Aaron in 17:5, "Then the LORD said to Moses, '... take along the rod with which you struck the Nile,'" an action that was performed by Aaron (7:19-20). But all of Aaron's signs (the serpent, the Nile, the frogs, and the lice) are of the "lower" sort. The necessity to hold out the rod might be to show the onlookers that the one holding the rod is performing the sign. Finally, the first and last signs—turning into a snake (4:3) and producing almond blossoms (Num. 17:23)—were performed by the rod on its own!

10 A serpent. Whereas in the sign Moses was given for the Israelites (4:3), it merely turned into a snake. But according to Japheth b. Ali the snake and the serpent are the same thing.

11 Wise men. The astrologers. **Sorcerers.** Those who "change" natural objects by fooling the eye. **Magicians.** Those who actually

[L] Ibn Ezra assumes that Aaron had to be commanded only when the signs needed to be performed; see his comment at v. 6.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 6 **So they did.** Even though it meant taking their lives in their hands (Hizkuni).

7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three. One does not send emotional youngsters to the king for such a task, but elders who have acquired wisdom (Abarbanel). Despite their old age, they rose early to do their Creator's will with alacrity. Even in those days, 80 was quite old, as we learn from Moses' own words: "A prayer of Moses.... The span of our life is seventy years, or, given the strength, eighty years" (Ps. 90:1,10) (Sforno).

9 Produce your marvel. I know the man; he will insist that you perform a miracle to confirm your bona fides. But do not do so; simply perform the "sign" that I showed you (Abarbanel). **A serpent.** Hinting that Pharaoh, the "mighty serpent" of Ezek. 29:3, will be swallowed up and eliminated from the world (Bekhor Shor).

11 Magicians. Since to this day nothing is known to us about the nature of magic, there is no point in discussing it (Gersonides). The existence of magic is established by the Torah and confirmed by our Sages (Abarbanel).

OJPS stretch forth My hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them." "And Moses and Aaron did so; as the LORD commanded them, so did they. "And Moses was fourscore years old, and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spoke unto Pharaoh.

"And the LORD spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying: "When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying: Show a wonder for you; then thou shalt say unto Aaron: Take thy rod, and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it become a serpent." "And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so, as the LORD had commanded; and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. "Then Pharaoh also called for the

מתוכם: 6 ויעש משה ואהרן כאשר צוה יהוה אתם בן עשו: 7 ומשה בן שמנים שנה ואהרן בן שלש ושמנים שנה בדברם אל פרעה: פ
8 ויאמר יהוה אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר: 9 כי ידבר אלכם פרעה לאמר תנו לכם מופת ואמרת אל אהרן קח את מטהך והשלך לפני פרעה יהי לתנין: 10 ויבא משה ואהרן אל פרעה ויעשו כן כאשר צוה יהוה וישלך אהרן את מטהו לפני פרעה ולפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין: 11 ויקרא גם פרעה לחכמים ולמכשפים

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS ♦ Why is Aaron included in the instructions (vv. 8-9) for the marvel of the serpent, but in none of the others? ♦ What made God so sure (v. 9) that Pharaoh (who had no desire even to listen to them, and who had told them in 5:4, "Get to your labors!") would ask them to produce a marvel? ♦ Why is the same trick that is previously called a "sign" now called a "marvel"? ♦ Why must Aaron perform the marvel with his rod rather than Moses with his, as previously instructed? ♦ Why does the rod here turn into a "serpent" rather than a "snake"? ♦ Why did they perform this marvel (v. 10) without first warning Pharaoh that it was about to happen, as they did with all the previous ones? ♦ If this marvel could only be performed through the power of God, "who alone works great marvels" (Ps. 136:4), how were the magicians (v. 11) able to do it?

IBN EZRA 6 **This Moses and Aaron did.** This is a general statement indicating that all of the plagues were performed by both Aaron and Moses. Later, each plague will be described individually.

7 Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three. These are the only prophets anywhere in the Bible who are identified as prophesying in their old age. For they were of greater stature than any other prophet. The others were prophets of reproof, or foretold the future, but only to Moses and Aaron did God speak from a pillar of cloud, and it is through them that the righteous inherit the World To Come.

8 Moses and Aaron. God knew that the first time (5:2) Pharaoh would merely