

Exodus

1

Summary: *The sons of Israel multiply in Egypt, fulfilling the creation mandate, until a new Pharaoh who does not know Joseph enslaves them. When state-sponsored infanticide targets Hebrew boys, two midwives defy the king's order because they fear God.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter opens with a cascade of creation-language verbs — *paru*, *vayyishretzu*, *vayyirbu* ('were fruitful, swarmed, multiplied') — deliberately echoing Genesis 1:28 and the teeming life of Genesis 1:20-21. Covenant fruitfulness thrives inside imperial oppression. Meanwhile, two named women (Shiphrah and Puah) resist an unnamed Pharaoh; the text grants enduring honor to the resisters and anonymity to the tyrant.*

Translation Friction: *The verb *vayyishretzu* ('swarmed') posed a real translation decision. The root *sharats* is used for teeming aquatic life in Genesis 1 — it carries connotations of unstoppable, almost biological increase. We retained 'swarmed' rather than softening it, because the Hebrew deliberately makes Israel's growth sound like creation bursting its banks. The phrase *yotsei yerekh* ('those who came out of Jacob's thigh') we rendered as 'from Jacob's own line' to preserve the kinship meaning without the anatomical idiom.*

Connections: *The tribal list echoes Genesis 46:8-27. The creation verbs point back to Genesis 1:28 and 9:1. The midwives' civil disobedience anticipates Daniel 3 and Acts 5:29. God building 'households' for the midwives (v21) foreshadows the house-building promise of 2 Samuel 7:11.*

¹These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each man with his household: ²namely Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, ³Issachar and Zebulun and Benjamin, ⁴Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher. ⁵All the persons who came from Jacob's own line were seventy in all, and Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. ⁷But the sons of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and became exceedingly strong, and the land was filled with them. ⁸Now a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. ⁹He said to his people, "Look, the people of the sons of Israel are too many and too strong for us. ¹⁰Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and leave the land." ¹¹So they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens, and they built supply cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses. ¹²But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and spread out, so the Egyptians came to dread the sons of Israel. ¹³Then the Egyptians forced the sons

of Israel to serve with harshness. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and brick and in every kind of field work. In all their labor they forced them to serve with brutality. ¹⁵Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one named Shiphrah and the other named Puah. ¹⁶He said, "When you help the Hebrew women give birth and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, put him to death; if it is a daughter, let her live." ¹⁷But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them; they let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this and let the boys live?" ¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them." ²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, He made households for them. ²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son that is born you must throw into the Nile, but every daughter you shall let live."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The chapter opens with a deliberate echo of Genesis 46, linking Exodus to the covenant family history. The story of deliverance begins with remembered names, not anonymous masses.
2. The tribal list begins with Leah's first four sons, following established birth-order tradition in Genesis.
3. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin complete the core sons born to Leah and Rachel before the sons of the maidservants are listed.
4. The full list preserves the continuity of the twelve-tribe identity before Israel becomes a nation in Egypt.
5. 'From Jacob's own line' literally reflects the Hebrew idiom 'those who came out of Jacob's thigh,' a kinship expression for direct descendants.
6. With Joseph and that generation gone, the narrative shifts from family memory to political vulnerability under a new regime.
7. The cluster of verbs ('fruitful,' 'swarmed,' 'multiplied,' 'became strong') intentionally echoes creation and patriarchal blessing language, showing covenant increase in exile.
8. 'Did not know Joseph' likely means more than personal ignorance; it signals political refusal to honor Joseph's legacy and policy shift toward oppression.
9. Pharaoh frames Israel as a demographic threat. Fear-driven rhetoric becomes the justification for state violence.
10. The Hebrew says 'deal wisely' (or shrewdly), but the wisdom is corrupt: it is strategic oppression disguised as national security.
11. The move from anxiety to policy is immediate: economic exploitation through forced labor. 'Supply/treasure cities' indicates state-building through enslaved bodies.
12. The text stresses ironic reversal: oppression accelerates Israel's growth instead of suppressing it, intensifying Egyptian fear.
13. 'With harshness' (befarekh) introduces a key term for crushing, ruthless labor that defines Israel's bondage.
14. The verse piles up labor terms to emphasize totalizing oppression: domestic production, construction labor, and agricultural service.
15. Two women are named in the narrative while Pharaoh remains only 'the king of Egypt.' The text grants enduring honor to faithful resistance.
16. The command targets males to destroy covenant continuity while absorbing females into Egyptian society. It is population control through selective infanticide.
17. The midwives' civil disobedience is explicitly theological: they fear God above Pharaoh. This is the first direct human resistance to imperial decree in Exodus.
18. Pharaoh's interrogation shows the state recognizes that quiet resistance can undermine policy more effectively than open revolt.
19. Their reply functions as protective speech under tyranny. Whether fully factual or strategic, the narrative commends the life-preserving result.
20. God's favor toward the midwives shows divine approval of their costly protection of vulnerable life.
21. 'He made households for them' likely means God granted them enduring family lines/status, reversing the threat of child-destruction with covenant-style fruitfulness.
22. Pharaoh expands policy from professional midwives to the whole population, moving from covert control to public genocide by decree.

2

Summary: *Moses is born into a Levite family, hidden, placed in a basket on the Nile, and rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. After killing an Egyptian and fleeing to Midian, he marries Zipporah. The chapter closes with Israel's cry reaching God, who remembers His covenant.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The word *tevah* ('basket') is the same rare word used for Noah's ark — the only two vessels in Scripture called by this name. Both preserve a chosen life through waters of death. The mother sees the child as *ki tov* ('good'), the same word God spoke over creation. The four climactic verbs of vv23-25 — God heard, remembered, saw, knew — form a comprehensive portrait of divine attention that drives the entire exodus.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered *tevah* as 'basket' rather than 'ark' to avoid confusion with the much larger vessel in Genesis, though the verbal echo is theologically essential and noted in our translator notes. The verb *zakhar* ('remembered') in v24 does not imply God forgot; we considered 'called to mind' to clarify that this is covenant activation, not memory recovery. The name *Mosheh*, explained from *mashah* ('to draw out'), encodes his future mission — the child drawn from water will draw a nation through water.*

Connections: *The *tevah* links to Genesis 6:14. Moses at the well echoes the betrothal type-scenes of Genesis 24 and 29. Gershom's name ('sojourner there') connects to Abraham's self-description in Genesis 23:4. The covenant remembered in v24 reaches back to Genesis 15:13-14 and forward to the burning bush in chapter 3.*

¹A man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. ²The woman conceived and bore a son. She saw that he was a fine child, and she hid him for three months. ³When she could no longer hide him, she took a papyrus basket and coated it with bitumen and pitch. She placed the child in it and set it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴His sister stationed herself at a distance to see what would happen to him. ⁵Then Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe at the Nile, while her attendants walked along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant girl to fetch it. ⁶So he opened it and saw the child — a baby boy, crying. She felt compassion for him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew children." ⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?" ⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water." ¹¹One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his brothers and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brothers. ¹²He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ¹³He went out the next day, and there were two Hebrew men fighting. He said to the one in the wrong, "Why are you striking your companion?" ¹⁴The man replied, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "The matter is surely known." ¹⁵When Pharaoh heard about this, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well. ¹⁶The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, filling the troughs to water their father's flock. ¹⁷But shepherds came and drove them away. Moses rose up and defended them and watered their flock. ¹⁸When they returned to Reuel their father, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" ¹⁹They said, "An Egyptian man rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock." ²⁰He said to his daughters, "Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to eat bread." ²¹Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses. ²²She bore a son, and he called his name Gershom, for he said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." ²³During those many days the king of Egypt died. The sons of Israel groaned because of the slavery and cried out, and their cry for help rose up to God from the bondage. ²⁴God heard their cries of anguish and called to mind His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵God saw the sons of Israel, and God knew.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses's birth is framed within the tribe of Levi, tying him to the line that will serve at the tabernacle. The text withholds the parents' names until 6:20, keeping the focus on the vulnerability of the child.
2. 'She saw that he was good' (ki tov hu) uses the same word God spoke over creation. The mother perceives something in this child that echoes divine intent — not merely physical beauty but providential significance.
3. The word for 'basket' is tevah — the same rare word used for Noah's ark in Genesis 6-9. Only two vessels in the Bible are called tevah: Noah's ark and Moses's basket. Both preserve a chosen life through waters of death.
4. Miriam's watchful station is the first act of covert resistance in Moses's story. She positions herself as a silent witness, ready to intervene at the right moment.
5. Pharaoh's daughter descends to the Nile — the same river her father decreed as the instrument of Hebrew infanticide. Salvation comes from inside the oppressor's household, by the hand of the oppressor's own family.
6. Pharaoh's daughter immediately identifies the child as Hebrew, yet instead of enforcing her father's decree, she responds with compassion. The verb chamol ('had compassion') signals maternal tenderness overriding state policy.
7. Miriam's offer is strategic brilliance under pressure: she provides the solution Pharaoh's daughter needs while restoring Moses to his own mother. The deliverer will be nursed on Hebrew identity inside an Egyptian court.
8. The single-word permission — 'Go' (lekhi) — sets the rescue in motion. Pharaoh's daughter becomes an unwitting agent of the very covenant continuity her father sought to destroy.
9. The irony is layered: Pharaoh's treasury pays Moses's own mother to nurse him. Imperial resources finance the preservation of the child who will dismantle the empire.
10. The name Mosheh is explained from the verb mashah ('to draw out'). The child drawn from water will draw a nation through water. His Egyptian name encodes his Hebrew destiny.
11. 'He went out to his brothers' signals solidarity — Moses chooses identification with the enslaved over comfort in the palace. The phrase 'saw their forced labor' (sivlotam) uses the same word from 1:11, connecting Moses's awakening to the systemic oppression described in chapter 1.
12. Moses acts against injustice but without divine commission. He looks 'this way and that' — checking for human witnesses rather than seeking divine direction. Zeal without calling leads to exile, not deliverance.
13. Moses attempts to mediate between Hebrews, but his authority is not yet recognized. The question 'Why are you striking your companion?' reveals Moses's instinct for justice, but the response in v14 exposes his lack of standing.
14. 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' — the question is prophetically ironic, since God will make Moses exactly that. But the challenge also reveals that self-appointed deliverance is rejected; only God-commissioned authority carries legitimacy.
15. Moses flees to Midian, exchanging the court of Pharaoh for the wilderness. This exile is not wasted time — it is preparation. The well where he sits will become a meeting place, echoing the well-scenes of the patriarchs (Genesis 24, 29).
16. The well scene follows the biblical type-scene pattern: a man meets women at a well in a foreign land, an act of service occurs, and marriage follows. Moses's story deliberately echoes Jacob's meeting with Rachel at the well (Genesis 29:1-12).
17. Moses again intervenes for the vulnerable — this time defending women from aggressive shepherds. The pattern from v11-12 recurs, but without lethal force. His instinct for justice persists across every setting.
18. Reuel ('friend of God') is also called Jethro. The multiple names for Moses's father-in-law have generated extensive scholarly discussion, but the narrative treats them as the same person.
19. The daughters describe Moses as 'an Egyptian man' — he looks, speaks, and acts Egyptian. His dual identity (Hebrew by birth, Egyptian by upbringing) will persist until God redefines him at the burning bush.
20. Reuel's rebuke of his daughters for not inviting Moses reflects ancient Near Eastern hospitality norms. The invitation to 'eat bread' is the standard gesture of welcome and the beginning of social bond.
21. Moses settles in Midian and marries into a priestly family. His wilderness years will school him in the terrain through which he will later lead Israel.
22. Gershom means 'a sojourner there' — the name encodes exile. Moses names his son after his displacement, preserving in the child's identity the truth that Midian is not home. The sojourner theme links Moses to Abraham (Genesis 23:4) and the entire patriarchal experience of landlessness.
23. The king's death changes the political landscape but not the theological reality. Israel's cry rises not as political petition but as raw groaning under slavery — and this groaning reaches God. The verb za'aq ('cry out') is the technical term for a covenant distress call.
24. 'God remembered His covenant' — the verb zakhar does not imply forgetfulness but activation. God now moves from patient observation to decisive intervention. The covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob becomes the engine of exodus. Deliverance is not random rescue but covenant fulfillment.

25. 'God saw ... God knew' — the four verbs of v23-25 (heard, remembered, saw, knew) form a comprehensive portrait of divine attention. Yada ('knew') means intimate, personal awareness — not mere information but relational knowledge that compels action.

3

Summary: God appears to Moses in a burning bush at Horeb, reveals the divine name ehyeh asher ehyeh ('I AM WHO I AM'), and commissions him to bring Israel out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey.

What Makes This Remarkable: The bush (seneh) is a humble desert shrub, possibly punning on Sinai — God appears in what is ordinary, not grand. The divine name ehyeh asher ehyeh resists all domestication: it carries both present force ('I am') and future promise ('I will be'). The first-person ehyeh becomes third-person YHWH in v15 — what God declares of Himself becomes the name by which others invoke Him. This is also the first occurrence of qodesh ('holy') in Exodus, introduced not as moral purity but as the relational condition created by divine presence.

Translation Friction: The divine name ehyeh asher ehyeh we rendered 'I AM WHO I AM,' preserving the traditional English while noting in our translator notes that 'I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE' is equally valid. Both renderings are present in the Hebrew imperfect form. The phrase paqod paqadti ('I have carefully watched over') required expansion beyond the bare 'I have visited' because the English word 'visit' has lost its weight; the Hebrew denotes covenant inspection that compels action.

Connections: The double call 'Moses! Moses!' echoes Abraham's call in Genesis 22:11. The hineni response places Moses in the line of covenant servants (Genesis 22:1; 1 Samuel 3:4). The land promise with six peoples restates Genesis 15:18-21. God's descent to deliver (v8) echoes the descent at Babel (Genesis 11:7).

1Now Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from within a bush. He looked, and the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. 3Moses said, "I must turn aside and see this remarkable sight — why the bush does not burn up." 4When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him from within the bush: "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5He said, "Do not come near. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6Then He said, "I am the God of your father — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sufferings. 8I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey — to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9Now the cry of the sons of Israel has come to Me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10Come now, I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." 11But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" 12He said, "I will surely be with you, and this will be the sign for you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain." 13Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' — what shall I say to them?" 14God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Say this to the sons of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15God also said to Moses, "Say this to the sons of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is how I am to be remembered from generation to generation. 16Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob — appeared to me, saying: I have carefully watched over you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt. 17I have declared that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites — a land flowing with milk and honey.' 18They will listen to your voice, and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt

and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Now please let us go a three-day journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' ¹⁹But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. ²⁰So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wonders that I will perform in it. After that he will let you go. ²¹And I will give this people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, so that when you go, you shall not go empty-handed. ²²Each woman shall ask of her neighbor and of the woman staying in her house for articles of silver and articles of gold and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'The mountain of God' (har ha'Elohim) names Horeb in retrospect — the narrator reveals its future significance. Moses does not seek revelation; he is shepherding sheep in an unremarkable wilderness. Divine encounter comes to a man doing ordinary work.
2. The bush burns with fire but is not consumed — the fire does not depend on the bush as fuel. This signals a presence that sustains without destroying, a holiness that inhabits creation without annihilating it. The image becomes foundational for understanding how God dwells among finite creatures.
3. Moses's decision to 'turn aside' (sur) is the hinge of the narrative. Had he not turned, the call might not have come. Revelation requires attentiveness — God speaks when Moses shows he is willing to look.
4. The double call 'Moses! Moses!' echoes the calling of Abraham ('Abraham! Abraham!' Genesis 22:11). The repeated name signals urgency and intimacy. Moses's response — hineni, 'Here I am' — matches Abraham's response at the Aqedah, placing Moses in the line of covenant servants who make themselves wholly available to God.
5. 'Holy ground' (admat qodesh) — the first use of qodesh ('holy') in Exodus. Holiness is not an inherent quality of the soil but a condition created by divine presence. The command to remove sandals marks a boundary: the one approaching God must acknowledge that he stands on ground that has been set apart by God's nearness.
6. The three-fold identification — God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob — anchors the burning bush revelation to the patriarchal covenant tradition. The God who appears is not unknown; He is the God who has already made promises and kept them. Moses hides his face because seeing God is dangerous (cf. Exodus 33:20).
7. Four verbs pile up: 'I have seen... heard... know.' God's awareness of suffering is comprehensive — visual, auditory, and relational. The word for 'sufferings' (makh'ovav) connotes pain at the deepest level. God does not observe suffering from a distance; He knows it intimately.
8. 'I have come down' (yaradti) — God descends to act. The same verb describes God's descent at Babel (Genesis 11:7) and will describe His descent at Sinai (Exodus 19:20). Divine intervention is portrayed spatially: God moves toward His people. The land promise is restated with the full list of six peoples, linking the exodus to the Abrahamic land grant.
9. The cry and the oppression are mentioned together: Israel's voice reaches heaven, and God sees the mechanism of their suffering. Both dimensions — the victims' experience and the oppressors' system — are held in divine awareness.
10. God commissions Moses with a purpose that exceeds every human qualification: bring My people out of Egypt. The pronoun 'My people' (ammi) asserts covenant ownership — Israel belongs to God, not to Pharaoh.
11. Moses's first objection is about identity: 'Who am I?' The deliverer's self-doubt is not false modesty but honest recognition that the task is absurdly disproportionate to the messenger. Every subsequent prophet will echo this inadequacy.
12. God's answer bypasses the question entirely. Moses asks 'Who am I?' and God answers 'I will be with you.' The sign is backward-looking — you will know I sent you when you worship on this mountain — requiring faith before confirmation. Presence, not credentials, is the ground of mission.
13. Moses's second objection concerns God's identity: 'What is His name?' In the ancient world, knowing a god's name meant knowing their character, jurisdiction, and accessibility. Moses is asking: who are You, specifically, that I should stake everything on Your commission?
14. Ehyeh asher ehyeh — 'I AM WHO I AM' or 'I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.' The name resists domestication. God does not give a name that fits human categories; He gives a name that redefines all categories. The first-person form ehyeh ('I am/will be') becomes the third-person YHWH ('He is/will be') in v15 — the name by which others will invoke what God declares of Himself.
15. The name YHWH is declared permanent — 'This is My name forever' (le'olam). The covenant name is not temporary or situational; it defines God's relationship with His people across all generations. The word zikri ('My memorial/remembrance') means this name is the handle by which humanity calls upon God.
16. Moses is instructed to begin with the elders — covenant leadership structures precede national action. The phrase paqod paqadti ('I have carefully watched over') is a technical covenant-visitation term: God comes to inspect, intervene, and fulfill what He has promised.
17. The land description 'flowing with milk and honey' (zavat chalav udevash) depicts agricultural abundance — a pastoral paradise contrasted with Egyptian slave labor. The phrase will become a fixed formula throughout the Pentateuch for the promised land.

18. The request for a three-day journey is a formal worship petition, not deception. The narrative presents it as a legitimate first demand; Pharaoh's refusal even of this modest request exposes the totality of his opposition.
19. God reveals Pharaoh's intransigence in advance. The resistance is not a surprise but part of the divine plan. The phrase 'mighty hand' (yad chazaqah) will become one of Exodus's signature descriptions of divine power.
20. 'I will stretch out My hand' — God's hand replaces Pharaoh's hand. The contest is between two 'hands' — Pharaoh's hand of oppression and God's hand of deliverance. The wonders (nifle'otai) are not spectacle but covenant-judgment acts.
21. God will reverse the economics of slavery: the enslaved will leave with the wealth of their oppressors. The word chen ('favor') echoes the language of covenant grace — God gives Israel unmerited favor in the eyes of Egypt.
22. The plundering of Egypt is not theft but the restitution of unpaid slave wages. Israel leaves with silver, gold, and clothing — the raw materials that will later construct the tabernacle. Egypt's wealth becomes God's dwelling.

4

Summary: Moses raises further objections to his commission; God provides three signs and appoints Aaron as his spokesman. On the journey back to Egypt, the LORD confronts Moses at a lodging place, and Zipporah performs emergency circumcision. God declares Israel His firstborn son.

What Makes This Remarkable: Moses's phrase kevad-peh ukhevad lashon ('heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue') uses the same root kaved that will describe Pharaoh's hardened heart — the deliverer's weakness and the tyrant's stubbornness share a single Hebrew word, and both are overcome by God. The declaration 'Israel is My son, My firstborn' (beni vekhori Yisra'el, v22) is the most compressed statement of covenant identity in the Pentateuch, and it sets the theological logic for the tenth plague: firstborn for firstborn.

Translation Friction: We retained 'heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue' as a literal rendering rather than paraphrasing to 'slow of speech,' because the kaved wordplay with Pharaoh's heart is theologically load-bearing. The enigmatic phrase chatan damim ('bridegroom of blood,' v25-26) remains one of the most debated in the Torah. We rendered it literally and let the translator notes carry the interpretive weight, since no single English phrase can capture the intertwined meanings of marriage, blood, and covenant.

Connections: The staff-to-serpent sign in v3 echoes the nachash of Genesis 3:1 and anticipates the contest with Pharaoh's magicians in 7:10-12. 'All the men who sought your life are dead' (v19) echoes Genesis 31:3 and will be echoed in Matthew 2:20. The firstborn declaration (v22-23) sets up the Passover theology of chapters 11-12.

1Moses answered, "But what if they do not believe me or listen to my voice? They may say, 'The LORD did not appear to you.'" 2The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff." 3He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses fled from it. 4Then the LORD said to Moses, "Reach out your hand and grasp it by the tail" — so he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand — 5"so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you." 6Then the LORD said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand inside his cloak, and when he drew it out, his hand was leprous, white as snow. 7He said, "Put your hand back inside your cloak." He put his hand back, and when he drew it out, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8"If they do not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. 9But if they do not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you take from the Nile shall become blood on the ground." 10 Then Moses said to the LORD, "Please, Lord, I have never been a man of words — not yesterday, not the day before, and not since You have spoken to Your servant. I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." 11The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes a person mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12Now go. I Myself will be with your mouth and will teach you what to say." 13But Moses said, "Please, Lord, send someone else." 14Then the anger of the LORD burned against Moses. He said, "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and when he sees you, his heart will be glad. 15You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I

will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you both what to do. ¹⁶He shall speak for you to the people, and he will be your mouth, and you will be as God to him. ¹⁷Take this staff in your hand, for with it you shall perform the signs." ¹⁸Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Please let me go back to my brothers in Egypt to see whether they are still alive." Jethro said to Moses, "Go in peace." ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who sought your life are dead." ²⁰So Moses took his wife and his sons, set them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt. And Moses took the staff of God in his hand. ²¹The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have placed in your hand. But I will harden his heart, and he will not let the people go. ²²Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: Israel is My son, My firstborn. ²³I said to you, Let My son go so that he may serve Me, but you have refused to let him go. Now I will kill your son, your firstborn.'" ²⁴On the way, at a lodging place, the LORD met him and sought to put him to death. ²⁵Zipporah took a flint knife and cut off her son's foreskin and touched it to his feet. She said, "You are a bridegroom of blood to me." ²⁶So the LORD let him alone. It was then that she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to the circumcision. ²⁷The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he traveled and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. ²⁸Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which He had sent him and all the signs He had commanded him to perform. ²⁹Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered all the elders of the sons of Israel. ³⁰Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and he performed the signs in the sight of the people. ³¹The people believed. When they heard that the LORD had visited the sons of Israel and that He had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshipped.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses's third objection concerns Israel's potential disbelief. Each objection has escalated: 'Who am I?' (3:11) 'What is Your name?' (3:13) 'What if they don't believe me?' (4:1). The progression reveals deepening resistance.
2. God starts with what Moses already holds — an ordinary shepherd's staff. The most powerful sign-instrument in Exodus is not something new but something transformed. God repurposes the mundane.
3. The staff becomes a nachash ('serpent') — a word loaded with Genesis echoes (Genesis 3:1). The serpent was also a symbol of royal Egyptian power (the uraeus cobra on Pharaoh's crown). God demonstrates mastery over both primordial and political symbols of power.
4. Moses must seize the serpent by its tail — the most dangerous way to grasp a snake. The act requires trust: what looks like certain harm becomes, in obedience, restored authority. The staff of a shepherd becomes the staff of God.
5. The signs authenticate Moses's commission by connecting him to the God already known to Israel — 'the God of their fathers.' Legitimacy is grounded in covenant continuity, not novel revelation.
6. The leprous hand demonstrates God's power over the body itself — to wound and to restore at command. Leprosy (tsara'at) represents the most severe ritual impurity, making this sign about both power and purity under divine control.
7. Immediate restoration proves that the affliction is demonstration, not punishment. God who wounds is the God who heals. The speed of healing — instant, complete — conveys absolute sovereignty over human flesh.
8. God provides a second sign as accommodation for weak faith. He does not demand perfect trust before acting; He provides enough evidence to make trust reasonable.
9. The water-to-blood sign foreshadows the first plague and targets the Nile — Egypt's source of life and object of worship. What sustains Egypt will testify against Egypt.
10. 'Heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue' (kevad-peh ukhevad lashon) — the word kaved ('heavy') is the same root used for Pharaoh's 'hardened' (kaved) heart later in Exodus. Moses's mouth is 'heavy'; Pharaoh's heart will be 'heavy.' The wordplay links the deliverer's weakness to the tyrant's stubbornness — both are overcome by God.
11. God's response reframes the objection entirely. Moses says 'I can't speak'; God says 'I made the mouth.' The Creator of speech does not need an eloquent messenger — He needs a willing one.
12. 'I Myself will be with your mouth' (anokhi ehyeh im-pikha) — the verb ehyeh ('I will be') is the same word from the divine name in 3:14. 'I AM' will be with Moses's mouth. God's identity and God's promise of presence are inseparable.
13. Moses's final plea — 'send someone else' (shelach na beyad-tishlach) — drops all pretense of legitimate objection. This is bare refusal. It provokes the only moment of divine anger in the call narrative.

14. God's anger flares but does not consume. The provision of Aaron is both accommodation and consequence — Moses gets help but also shares a role that was offered to him alone. Grace and discipline arrive together.
15. God promises to be with both mouths — Moses's and Aaron's. The prophetic team is underwritten by the same divine presence that sustains the individual prophet.
16. 'You will be as God to him' (vehayita lo le'Elohim) — Moses stands in the God-role relative to Aaron, who serves as his 'prophet' (navi). This arrangement previews the Moses-Pharaoh relationship: Moses will also be 'as God to Pharaoh' (7:1).
17. The staff — now called 'this staff' and later 'the staff of God' (v20) — is a shepherd's tool transformed into a sign-bearing instrument. It bridges Moses's pastoral past and prophetic future.
18. Moses's request to Jethro is diplomatically understated — 'to see if they are still alive' — concealing the full scope of his divine commission. The dangerous political dimension remains implicit.
19. 'All the men who sought your life are dead' echoes the announcement to Jacob (Genesis 31:3) and will echo in the infancy narrative of Jesus (Matthew 2:20). God clears the immediate human threat before the divine mission begins.
20. Moses departs with his family and the staff of God. Household and mission travel together — there is no separation between personal life and prophetic calling. The 'staff of God' (matteh ha'Elohim) signals that the ordinary tool has been permanently claimed for divine use.
21. God announces Pharaoh's hardening before any confrontation. The Hebrew uses *chazaq* ('strengthen, make firm'), suggesting that Pharaoh's existing resistance will be judicially confirmed rather than artificially imposed. God's foreknowledge encompasses human stubbornness.
22. 'Israel is My son, My firstborn' (beni vekhori Yisra'el) — the most compressed statement of Israel's covenant identity in the entire Pentateuch. Sonship language establishes both intimacy and obligation. God claims Israel with a father's authority and a father's tenderness.
23. The firstborn-for-firstborn threat creates the theological logic of the tenth plague. If Pharaoh refuses to release God's firstborn (Israel), God will take Pharaoh's firstborn. The measure-for-measure principle structures the entire plague narrative.
24. This is one of the most enigmatic passages in the Bible. The LORD 'met him and sought to put him to death' — the God who just commissioned Moses now threatens to kill him. The most likely reading connects this to circumcision: Moses's son is uncircumcised, and the covenant sign must be applied before the covenant mission can proceed.
25. Zipporah acts with decisive urgency, performing emergency circumcision with a flint knife. She saves Moses's life through the covenant act he has neglected. The phrase *chatan damim* ('bridegroom of blood') ties marriage, blood, and covenant into a single declaration — the household must be covenantally ordered before the deliverer can confront Pharaoh.
26. The crisis resolves when the covenant sign is applied. The passage, however brief and obscure, establishes a non-negotiable principle: the one who carries God's mission must first carry God's covenant mark. Ministry without covenant obedience is mortal danger.
27. God orchestrates the meeting of Moses and Aaron at the mountain of God — the same location as the burning bush. The kiss of reunion bonds the prophetic partnership at the site of revelation.
28. Moses transmits God's words and signs to Aaron — the chain of revelation runs from God to Moses to Aaron to the people. This communication structure will define Israel's prophetic office throughout the Torah.
29. The gathering of elders reconstitutes Israel's covenant leadership after centuries of slavery. Corporate witness precedes corporate action.
30. Aaron speaks and performs signs before the people — the dual commission (word and sign) authenticates the message. Israel has been given evidence sufficient for trust.
31. The people's response combines belief, bowing, and worship. When they hear that God has 'visited' (*paqad*) them and 'seen' (*ra'ah*) their affliction, their response mirrors the four divine verbs of 2:24-25: God heard, remembered, saw, knew — and now the people believe, bow, and worship. The divine initiative produces human response.

5

Summary: Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh with the demand 'Let My people go,' but Pharaoh refuses, increases the labor quotas by withholding straw, and the Israelite foremen turn against Moses. Moses challenges God: 'Why have You brought harm upon this people?'

*What Makes This Remarkable: Two competing speech formulas collide: 'Thus says the LORD' (koh amar YHWH, v1) versus 'Thus says Pharaoh' (koh amar Par'oh, v10). The chapter stages a contest over whose word governs reality. Pharaoh dismisses God's command as *divrei shaqer* ('lying words,' v9) — the most truthful speech in the universe is labeled deception by the most powerful man on earth. Moses's raw complaint to God in vv22-23 uses the infinitive absolute construction: 'delivering, You have*

not delivered.'

Translation Friction: *We rendered the Hebrew chag (v1) as 'feast' rather than 'festival' or 'pilgrimage,' though the term denotes a communal covenant worship gathering, not a banquet. Pharaoh's nitchakkemah ('let us deal shrewdly,' from 1:10, echoed here in his tactics) sits on the boundary between wisdom and cunning; we chose 'shrewdly' to preserve the ironic corruption of a wisdom-word. The phrase hiv'ashtem et-reichenu ('you have made our smell stink,' v21) we rendered as 'made us repulsive' for clarity, though the literal olfactory image is vivid.*

Connections: *Pharaoh's 'Who is the LORD?' (v2) echoes the king who 'did not know Joseph' (1:8) — both use yada as political refusal. Moses's complaint anticipates the lament psalms (Psalm 13:1-2; 44:23-24). God's answer comes in 6:1, completing the arc begun here.*

¹Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go so that they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness." ²Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go." ³They said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go a three-day journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God, or He may strike us with pestilence or with the sword." ⁴The king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get back to your labors!" ⁵Pharaoh also said, "The people of the land are now many, and you would have them stop working!" ⁶That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen, saying, ⁷"You shall no longer give the people straw for making bricks as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸But the quota of bricks that they were making before — you shall impose the same amount on them. You shall not reduce it, for they are lazy. That is why they cry out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' ⁹Let the work be heavier on the men so that they are occupied with it and pay no attention to lying words." ¹⁰So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and said to the people, "Thus says Pharaoh: I will not give you straw. ¹¹Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your workload will not be reduced at all." ¹²So the people scattered throughout all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. ¹³The taskmasters were relentless, saying, "Complete your daily work — the same amount as when straw was provided!" ¹⁴The foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and asked, "Why have you not completed your required amount of bricks, both yesterday and today, as you did before?" ¹⁵Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, "Why do you treat your servants this way? ¹⁶No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, 'Make bricks!' And your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people." ¹⁷He said, "You are lazy — lazy! That is why you say, 'Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.' ¹⁸Now go and work! No straw will be given to you, but you must deliver the full number of bricks." ¹⁹The foremen of the sons of Israel saw that they were in trouble when they were told, "You shall not reduce your daily number of bricks at all." ²⁰They met Moses and Aaron, who were waiting for them as they came out from Pharaoh. ²¹They said to them, "May the LORD look on you and judge! You have made us repulsive in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us." ²²Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Lord, why have You brought harm upon this people? Why did You ever send me? ²³From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people, and You have not delivered Your people at all."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses and Aaron open with 'Thus says the LORD' (koh amar YHWH) — the prophetic messenger formula. They speak not on their own authority but as authorized representatives. The request is specific: release for a wilderness feast (chag), a covenant worship gathering.
2. 'Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice?' — Pharaoh's question is not philosophical curiosity but political defiance. He positions himself as the only sovereign whose voice matters in Egypt. 'I do not know the LORD' (lo yadati et-YHWH) uses the same verb from 1:8 ('a king who did not know Joseph'). The refusal to 'know' is a refusal to acknowledge authority.
3. Moses and Aaron reframe the request as a matter of divine threat: failure to worship may bring pestilence or the sword. The warning shifts the dynamic from permission-request to life-or-death obedience, though Pharaoh remains unimpressed.
4. Pharaoh reframes the worship-request as labor disruption. In his worldview, the only relevant category for Israel is production. He reduces theology to economics: 'Why are you taking the people from their work?' The enslaver's logic recognizes only output, not worship.

5. Pharaoh notes that the people are 'many' (rabbim) — the very population growth that alarmed him in 1:9 now makes their labor stoppage an economic threat. His fear of their numbers works in both directions: too many to release, too many to let idle.
6. Pharaoh's response to a worship request is to increase oppression. The pattern will repeat throughout Exodus: prophetic confrontation provokes imperial escalation.
7. Straw was the binding agent in mud bricks — chopped straw mixed with clay prevents cracking. Removing the supply while maintaining quotas is not merely cruel but structurally impossible, designed to break the people's spirit and discredit Moses.
8. Pharaoh diagnoses the worship request as a symptom of idleness: 'they are lazy' (nirpim hem). He weaponizes the accusation of laziness to justify intensified oppression — a strategy used by slave systems throughout history to reframe resistance as character failure.
9. 'Lying words' (divrei shaqer) — Pharaoh categorizes God's own command as falsehood. The inversion is total: truth is called a lie, worship is called laziness, and obedience to God is treated as rebellion against the state.
10. The taskmasters relay Pharaoh's decree using his own formula: 'Thus says Pharaoh' (koh amar Par'oh), mimicking the prophetic 'Thus says the LORD.' The two speech formulas now stand in direct competition — whose word governs reality?
11. The workload remains the same; only the supply chain is disrupted. The impossible demand functions as collective punishment designed to turn the people against Moses and Aaron rather than against Pharaoh.
12. 'The people scattered' (vayyafets ha'am) — the verb puts ('scatter') echoes the scattering at Babel (Genesis 11:8). Oppression disintegrates communal life; the people are dispersed across the land searching for raw material instead of standing together.
13. 'Complete your daily work' — the Hebrew emphasizes daily (yom beyomo), constant pressure without relief. Oppression operates through exhaustion: no moment for rest, reflection, or resistance.
14. The foremen are Israelites placed in a middle position — responsible for quotas they cannot meet, beaten for failures they cannot prevent. The system turns Israelites against Israelites, using structural violence to fracture solidarity from within.
15. The foremen appeal directly to Pharaoh, still hoping that the system can be reasoned with from inside. Their cry 'Why do you treat your servants this way?' assumes their status as servants (avadim) entitles them to fair treatment — a dignity Pharaoh has already revoked.
16. The foremen's argument is structurally sound: we lack materials, yet face punishment. 'The fault is with your own people' (vechatat ammekha) dares to assign blame upward. This is remarkable courage under oppression.
17. Pharaoh repeats 'lazy' (nirpim) twice — the accusation hardens into a verdict. He will not engage with the argument about materials; he will only assert that the desire to worship is proof of insufficient labor. Religion is redefined as a labor-management problem.
18. The decree is final and unyielding: no straw, full quotas. Pharaoh's word, once spoken, does not negotiate or accommodate. This rigidity will prove to be his undoing, as it positions him immovably against God's equally uncompromising demand.
19. The foremen understand the trap: they are caught between Pharaoh's impossible quotas and their own people's desperation. The phrase 'they were in trouble' (bera) literally means 'in evil/distress' — the situation has become structurally hopeless within the Egyptian system.
20. The foremen encounter Moses and Aaron outside Pharaoh's palace — the confrontation between those inside the system and those who challenged it from outside. The two approaches to liberation now collide.
21. The foremen curse Moses and Aaron: 'You have made us repulsive' (hiv'ashtem et-reichenu) — literally, 'you have made our smell stink.' The accusation is painfully human: prophetic action has made life worse, not better. This is the cost of confrontation before deliverance arrives.
22. Moses's complaint to God is raw and honest: 'Why have You brought harm upon this people?' (lamah hare'otah la'am hazzeh). The same Moses who was reluctant to go now challenges God for the results of going. The verb hara ('do evil/harm') charges God with causing the suffering He promised to end.
23. 'You have not delivered Your people at all' (vehatsel lo-hitsalta et-ammekha) — the infinitive absolute construction intensifies the accusation: 'delivering, you have not delivered.' Moses throws God's own promise back at Him. This is not faithlessness but the anguished prayer of a man who trusted God and watched things get worse. It will receive its answer in 6:1.

6

Summary: *God answers Moses's complaint with a covenant-reaffirmation speech built on four 'I will' declarations, reveals that the patriarchs knew Him as El Shaddai but not yet by the full significance of YHWH, and provides the Levitical genealogy establishing Moses and Aaron's lineage.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The four 'I will' verbs of v6-8 — bring out, deliver, redeem, take — form the theological backbone of the exodus and traditionally correspond to the four cups of the Passover Seder. The climactic verb ga'al ('redeem') is kinsman-redeemer language: God acts not as a distant benefactor but as covenant kin. The phrase qotser ruach ('crushed spirit,' v9) — literally 'shortness of breath' — is one of Scripture's most psychologically accurate descriptions of sustained trauma: even good news cannot penetrate.*

Translation Friction: *The statement that God was not 'known' (noda) to the patriarchs by the name YHWH (v3) created tension with Genesis passages where the name appears. We rendered it 'I did not make Myself fully known to them,' following the interpretation that yada here means experiential knowledge of the name's redemptive significance, not mere awareness of the word. The metaphor aral sefatayim ('uncircumcised lips,' v12) we rendered as 'unskilled in speech' for readability, noting the striking covenant metaphor in our translator notes.*

Connections: *The four 'I will' declarations are echoed in the Passover Haggadah's four cups. The covenant formula of v7 ('I will take you as My people, I will be your God') recurs at Sinai (19:5-6), in Jeremiah 31:33, and Revelation 21:3. The genealogy connects to Numbers 3 and 1 Chronicles 6.*

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. By a mighty hand he will let them go, and by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land." ²God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD. ³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by My name the LORD I did not make Myself fully known to them. ⁴I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. ⁵Furthermore, I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel, whom the Egyptians hold in slavery, and I have remembered My covenant. ⁶Therefore say to the sons of Israel: 'I am the LORD. I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. ⁸I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.'" ⁹Moses spoke this to the sons of Israel, but they did not listen to him because of their crushed spirit and harsh bondage. ¹⁰Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹¹"Go in and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the sons of Israel go out of his land." ¹²But Moses said before the LORD, "If the sons of Israel have not listened to me, how will Pharaoh listen to me? I am unskilled in speech." ¹³The LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron and gave them a charge regarding the sons of Israel and regarding Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁴These are the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel — Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. These are the clans of Reuben. ¹⁵The sons of Simeon — Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the clans of Simeon. ¹⁶These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The years of Levi's life were 137 years. ¹⁷The sons of Gershon — Libni and Shimei, by their clans. ¹⁸The sons of Kohath — Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The years of Kohath's life were 133 years. ¹⁹The sons of Merari — Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites according to their generations. ²⁰Amram married Jochebed, his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses. The years of Amram's life were 137 years. ²¹The sons of Izhar — Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. ²²The sons of Uzziel — Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. ²³Aaron married Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab and the sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. ²⁴The sons of Korah — Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the clans of the Korahites. ²⁵Eleazar the son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites, by their clans. ²⁶It

was this Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts." ²⁷It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the sons of Israel out of Egypt — this Moses and Aaron. ²⁸On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹the LORD said to Moses, "I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you." ³⁰But Moses said before the LORD, "I am unskilled in speech. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. God's response to Moses's complaint (5:22-23) begins with a promise of force: 'by a mighty hand' (beyad chazaqah). The phrase will echo throughout Exodus as a signature description of divine power. God does not explain the delay; He announces decisive action.
2. 'I am the LORD' (ani YHWH) opens a formal covenant-reaffirmation speech (vv.2-8) that is among the most theologically dense passages in the Pentateuch. God speaks His own name as the ground of everything that follows.
3. The statement about El Shaddai and YHWH has generated centuries of debate. It does not mean the patriarchs never heard the name YHWH (cf. Genesis 15:7), but that they did not experience its full significance — the God who acts in redemptive power to fulfill covenant promises. The name's meaning is now being revealed through action, not merely speech.
4. 'Established My covenant' (haqimoti et-beriti) — the verb qum ('establish, set up') treats the covenant as a standing structure, erected and maintained by God. The land of Canaan is specifically named as the covenant's territorial content.
5. Divine 'hearing' and 'remembering' reprise the language of 2:24-25. God heard, remembered, saw, knew — and now He declares what He will do. The groaning of the enslaved has become the engine of salvation history.
6. The four 'I will' declarations form the theological backbone of the exodus: (1) I will bring you out, (2) I will deliver you, (3) I will redeem you, (4) I will take you. Each verb carries distinct weight. The climactic 'redeem' (ga'al) is kinsman-redeemer language — God acts not as a distant benefactor but as covenant kin who pays the price of liberation.
7. 'I will take you as My people, and I will be your God' — this is the covenant formula (formula of mutual belonging) that defines the God-Israel relationship throughout Scripture. It will be restated at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-6), in the prophets (Jeremiah 31:33), and in Revelation (21:3). Relationship, not merely rescue, is the goal of the exodus.
8. The speech closes as it opened: 'I am the LORD.' The entire declaration is bracketed by divine self-identification (vv.2, 8). The promises are as certain as the identity of the one who speaks them. The land sworn (nasa yadi, 'I lifted My hand') to the patriarchs is now the destination of the exodus.
9. 'Crushed spirit' (qotser ruach) — literally 'shortness of breath/spirit.' Oppression has compressed the people's inner capacity to the point where even good news cannot penetrate. This is one of the most psychologically accurate descriptions of sustained trauma in Scripture.
10. God does not wait for Israel to recover before issuing the next command. The mission moves forward regardless of the people's readiness.
11. The command to Pharaoh is blunt and direct: 'let them go' (shalach). No diplomacy, no negotiation — a sovereign demand.
12. Moses repeats his speech objection from 4:10, now using the phrase 'uncircumcised lips' (aral sefatayim) — an unusual metaphor linking speech inadequacy to covenant incompleteness. The word arel ('uncircumcised') will gain enormous significance at Sinai and beyond.
13. God responds to Moses's objection not with argument but with commissioning. He gives a 'charge' (tsav) to both Moses and Aaron — a formal military/legal command that overrides personal hesitation.
14. The genealogy begins with Reuben and Simeon (Jacob's first two sons) but quickly narrows to Levi — Moses and Aaron's tribe. The list legitimizes their authority by anchoring it in Israel's tribal structure.
15. Simeon's genealogy is brief, setting up the extended treatment of Levi that follows. The note about Shaul's Canaanite mother preserves the historical record without commentary.
16. The Levite genealogy becomes the chapter's center. Three sons of Levi — Gershon, Kohath, Merari — establish the branches from which all priestly and Levitical service will descend.
17. The Gershonite line is listed briefly; the narrative interest lies with the Kohathites (v18), from whom Moses and Aaron descend.
18. The Kohathite line is expanded because it leads to Amram, Moses and Aaron's father. The genealogical focus narrows with each generation toward the commissioned deliverers.
19. Merari's line completes the three-branch Levitical structure. This genealogical framework will govern tabernacle service assignments in Numbers.
20. Amram and Jochebed are named for the first time — Moses's parents, identified in the genealogical record. Jochebed is Amram's father's sister (dodah), a marriage later prohibited by Levitical law (Leviticus 18:12-13). The narrative records without judging.
21. Izhar's son Korah will later lead a rebellion against Moses (Numbers 16). The genealogy quietly positions future conflicts within the family tree.
22. Uzziel's sons will play roles in the tabernacle narrative (Leviticus 10:4). The genealogy plants seeds for later developments.

23. Aaron's wife Elisheba connects the priestly line to the tribe of Judah through Nahshon (cf. Ruth 4:20, 1 Chronicles 2:10). The marriage links the priestly and royal tribes at the genealogical level.
24. The Korahite clans will become significant in later Israelite worship — the 'sons of Korah' are credited with multiple psalms (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88).
25. Phinehas will become the great zealot for covenant faithfulness (Numbers 25:7-13). His genealogy here connects future zeal to the Aaronic priestly line.
26. The narrator breaks the genealogy to reidentify Moses and Aaron as the ones God commissioned. The genealogy serves the narrative, not the other way around — it exists to legitimize the mission.
27. The emphasis falls on 'this Moses and Aaron' (hu Mosheh ve'Aharon) — lest anyone mistake identities. The commissioned deliverers are specific, named individuals within a documented lineage.
28. The narrative returns to the commission scene, resuming from v13 after the genealogical interlude. The phrase 'on the day when' (beyom dibber) reconnects to the direct speech of God.
29. 'I am the LORD' again — the speech restarts with the same self-identification that opened the covenant declaration in v2. Repetition is not redundancy but rhetorical anchoring.
30. Moses's final objection returns verbatim — 'uncircumcised lips.' The repetition creates a literary frame (vv.12, 30) that brackets the genealogy, showing that Moses's inadequacy is not resolved by pedigree but by divine commission.

7

Summary: *God makes Moses 'like God to Pharaoh' with Aaron as his prophet, announces the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, and initiates the plague sequence. Aaron's staff swallows the magicians' staffs, the Nile turns to blood, but Pharaoh's heart remains hard.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter introduces three theologically dense elements at once: the knowledge formula ('the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD,' v5), the hardening motif using three different Hebrew verbs (chazaq, qasheh, kaved), and the recognition that Israel's enslaved workers are reidentified as God's tseva'ot ('hosts/armies,' v4). The magicians can replicate the blood-plague but cannot reverse it — imitation is not mastery.*

Translation Friction: *The hardening vocabulary required careful handling: chazaq ('strengthen/make firm'), qasheh ('make hard'), and kaved ('make heavy') each carry distinct nuances. We preserved these distinctions across our renderings rather than flattening them into a single English word. The phrase netatikha Elohim lePar'oh ('I have made you like God to Pharaoh,' v1) we rendered with 'like God' rather than simply 'a god,' because the Hebrew establishes Moses as God's authorized representative, not a deity.*

Connections: *Moses as 'God to Pharaoh' fulfills the arrangement previewed in 4:16. The knowledge formula ('they shall know that I am the LORD') will recur throughout Ezekiel (e.g., Ezekiel 6:7; 12:15). The staff-swallowing contest in v12 inverts the serpent's power from Genesis 3. The Nile-to-blood targets Egypt's source of life and worship.*

¹The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. ²You shall speak everything that I command you, and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh to let the sons of Israel go from his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart. I will multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. ⁴Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. ⁵The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt and bring the sons of Israel out from among them. ⁶Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh. ⁸The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a wonder,' you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a serpent." ¹⁰So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD had commanded. Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent. ¹¹Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the magicians of Egypt, also did the same by their secret arts. ¹²Each one threw down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. ¹³Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to

them, just as the LORD had said. ¹⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Stand by the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a serpent. ¹⁶Say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to you, saying: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷Thus says the LORD: By this you shall know that I am the LORD — I am about to strike the water in the Nile with the staff in my hand, and it will be turned to blood. ¹⁸The fish in the Nile will die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will be unable to drink water from the Nile.' ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt — over their rivers, their canals, their pools, and every body of water — so that they may become blood. There shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone." ²⁰Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. He raised the staff and struck the water in the Nile in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants, and all the water in the Nile was turned to blood. ²¹The fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank so that the Egyptians could not drink water from it. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt. ²²But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts, so Pharaoh's heart remained hard, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. ²³Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. ²⁴All the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, because they could not drink the water of the Nile. ²⁵Seven full days passed after the LORD struck the Nile. ²⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. ²⁷If you refuse to let them go, I will strike all your territory with frogs. ²⁸The Nile shall swarm with frogs, and they shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and onto your bed and into the houses of your servants and on your people and into your ovens and into your kneading bowls. ²⁹The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your servants.'"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'I have made you like God to Pharaoh' (netatikha Elohim lePar'oh) — Moses stands in the God-role relative to Pharaoh: he speaks with divine authority, commands signs, and pronounces judgment. Aaron functions as Moses's 'prophet' (navi) — the one who speaks the words on behalf of the authority.
2. The chain of revelation is formalized: God speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to Aaron, Aaron speaks to Pharaoh. This structure mirrors the prophetic office that will define Israel's relationship with God throughout its history.
3. 'I will harden Pharaoh's heart' (va'ani aqsheh et-lev Par'oh) — the verb qasheh means 'make hard, make stubborn.' God's hardening does not create rebellion from nothing but confirms and solidifies Pharaoh's own resistance. The purpose is to multiply signs — to demonstrate God's sovereignty so thoroughly that neither Egypt nor Israel can mistake who controls history.
4. 'My hosts, My people' (et-tsviv'otai et-ammi) — the military term tseva'ot ('hosts, armies') is applied to Israel for the first time. The enslaved workers are reidentified as God's army. The exodus is not merely escape but a military withdrawal of God's own forces from enemy territory.
5. The knowledge formula — 'they shall know that I am the LORD' (veya'du Mitsrayim ki-ani YHWH) — states the theological purpose of the plagues. The signs are revelatory, not merely punitive. Egypt will learn God's identity through judgment.
6. The obedience formula echoes Noah (Genesis 6:22) and Moses at Sinai: exact compliance with divine command, reported without embellishment.
7. Moses at eighty and Aaron at eighty-three — both are old men beginning the most consequential mission in Israel's history. Their ages signal that God's timing operates outside human career trajectories.
8. A new divine speech introduces the first sign before Pharaoh — the staff-to-serpent demonstration.
9. The staff becomes a tannin ('serpent, sea creature, dragon') — a word associated with chaos monsters in creation mythology (cf. Isaiah 27:1; 51:9). The sign challenges Egyptian cosmic symbolism at its root.
10. Aaron performs the sign as instructed — obedience precedes results. The sign is public, performed before Pharaoh and his court.
11. Pharaoh summons his own practitioners — chartumim ('magicians') and mekashfim ('sorcerers'). Their ability to replicate the sign by 'secret arts' (belahateihem) gives Pharaoh grounds for dismissal, though the replication is surface-level, not equal.
12. Aaron's staff swallows the Egyptian staffs — the contest is not merely matched but won. Superior power is demonstrated through consumption. The verb bala ('swallowed') is the same verb used when the earth swallows Korah (Numbers 16:32). God's instruments consume rivals.
13. 'Pharaoh's heart was hardened' (vayyechezaq lev Par'oh) — the first occurrence of the hardening formula in the plague narrative. The verb chazaq means 'was strengthened, became firm.' His heart locks into resistance.

14. God identifies Pharaoh's heart as kaved ('heavy, stubborn') — the same root as Moses's 'heavy mouth' (4:10). Both the prophet and the tyrant have something 'heavy,' but God works through the prophet's heaviness while judging the tyrant's.
15. Moses is to intercept Pharaoh at the Nile in the morning — possibly during a ritual visit. The confrontation happens at Egypt's sacred river, turning worship space into judgment space.
16. The demand 'Let My people go so they may serve Me' (shallach et-ammi vey'avdumi) uses the same verb for 'serve' (avad) that describes Israel's slavery. The contest is about who Israel will serve — Pharaoh or God.
17. 'By this you shall know that I am the LORD' — the knowledge formula accompanies the first plague. Each plague is designed to teach, not merely to punish. The Nile, Egypt's lifeline and object of worship, is the first target.
18. The death of the fish and the stinking of the river reverse the Nile's life-giving function. Egypt's source of sustenance becomes a source of death and repulsion.
19. The plague extends beyond the Nile to every water source in Egypt — rivers, canals, pools, even water stored in vessels. The judgment is comprehensive, leaving no workaround.
20. Moses and Aaron obey, and the Nile turns to blood. The act is performed 'in the sight of Pharaoh' — the sign is public and undeniable. The Nile, worshipped as the god Hapi, bleeds.
21. The consequences are immediate: dead fish, unbearable stench, undrinkable water. Egypt's prosperity, built on the Nile, is poisoned at its source.
22. The magicians replicate the sign — a pyrrhic victory, since more blood-water is the last thing Egypt needs. Their success gives Pharaoh an excuse to resist, and his heart 'remains hard' (vayyechezaq).
23. 'He did not take even this to heart' (velo-shat libbo gam-lazot) — Pharaoh retreats into his palace and refuses to internalize the sign. The verb shut ('set, place') with lev ('heart') means he did not allow the event to affect his inner disposition.
24. The people dig for filtered water — a desperate workaround that reveals the plague's severity. The populace suffers while Pharaoh remains unmoved in his palace.
25. Seven days — a complete cycle — pass after the plague. The duration signals divine patience: time for repentance before the next judgment.
26. The second plague sequence begins with the same formula: 'Let My people go so they may serve Me.' Each plague reissues the same demand, proving that God's patience has not replaced God's purpose.
27. Frogs as a plague challenge the Egyptian frog-goddess Heqet, associated with fertility and childbirth. The gods of Egypt are systematically confronted by the God of Israel.
28. The invasion is total — bedroom, bed, ovens, kneading bowls. The sacred (Heqet) becomes the revolting. No space in Egyptian life remains untouched.
29. The frogs come upon Pharaoh himself — the king is not insulated from the judgment he causes. His person bears the consequences of his refusal.

8

Summary: Three plagues unfold — frogs, gnats, and flies. The magicians replicate frogs but fail at gnats, conceding 'This is the finger of God.' God begins making a distinction (hiflah) between Egypt and Goshen. Pharaoh negotiates, concedes partially, then reneges each time.

What Makes This Remarkable: The magicians' confession etsba Elohim hi ('this is the finger of God,' v19) marks the moment Egypt's own religious experts recognize a power beyond their craft. The verb hiflah ('make a distinction,' v22) introduces a covenant principle that will intensify through the remaining plagues: belonging to God creates a different experiential reality. Pharaoh's pattern of concession-then-retraction reveals that his negotiations are strategic, never sincere.

Translation Friction: The Hebrew tsinnim (v17, sometimes rendered 'lice' or 'gnats') posed a translation challenge — the exact insect is uncertain. We chose 'gnats' following the consensus that these are small biting insects arising from dust, contrasting with the larger swarm (arov) that follows. The word arov (v21, typically 'flies' or 'swarms') has no modifier specifying the creature type; we rendered it 'swarms of flies' for clarity while noting the ambiguity.

Connections: The 'finger of God' (v19) reappears when God writes the tablets with His finger (31:18) and in Jesus's claim in Luke 11:20. The Goshen distinction anticipates the Passover distinction of chapter 12. Pharaoh's broken promises foreshadow the pattern that continues through chapters 9-10.

¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and bring up frogs over the land of Egypt." ²Aaron extended his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs swarmed up and blanketed the land. ³But the magicians did the same by their secret arts and brought up frogs on the land of Egypt. ⁴Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Plead with the LORD to remove the frogs from me and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." ⁵Moses said to Pharaoh, "You may have the honor over me: set the time when I should pray for you and your servants and your people, to cut off the frogs from you and your houses, so that they remain only in the Nile." ⁶He said, "Tomorrow." Moses said, "It shall be as you say, so that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God. ⁷The frogs will depart from you and your houses and from your servants and your people. They will remain only in the Nile." ⁸Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh, and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs He had brought upon Pharaoh. ⁹The LORD did as Moses asked, and the frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards, and in the fields. ¹⁰They gathered them into piles, and the land stank. ¹¹But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. ¹²Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground, and it shall become gnats throughout all the land of Egypt." ¹³They did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the ground, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the ground became gnats throughout the land of Egypt. ¹⁴The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. The gnats were on man and beast. ¹⁵Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had said. ¹⁶Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh as he goes out to the water, and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. ¹⁷For if you do not let My people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms, and even the ground on which they stand. ¹⁸But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where My people dwell, so that no swarms shall be there, in order that you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land. ¹⁹I will put a distinction between My people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall come about.'" ²⁰The LORD did so. A grievous swarm of flies came into the house of Pharaoh and into the houses of his servants. Throughout all the land of Egypt the ground was ruined by the swarms. ²¹Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God within the land." ²²But Moses said, "It would not be right to do so, for we would be sacrificing to the LORD our God what is detestable to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice what is detestable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us? ²³We must go a three-day journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as He commands us." ²⁴Pharaoh said, "I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness, but you must not go very far away. Pray for me." ²⁵Moses said, "I am going out from you, and I will pray to the LORD that the swarms depart from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people tomorrow. But Pharaoh must not deal deceitfully again by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD." ²⁶So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. ²⁷The LORD did as Moses asked and removed the swarms from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people. Not one remained. ²⁸But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also and did not let the people go.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The frog plague begins with the same commission structure: God commands, Moses relays, Aaron acts. The frogs emerge from the Nile — the same river that was already struck with blood. Egypt's sacred waterway produces one plague after another.
2. The frogs 'covered the land' — totality is the pattern of each plague. God's judgments are not partial or localized (except for Goshen); they saturate Egyptian life.
3. The magicians replicate the plague — again adding to the problem rather than solving it. Their ability to produce frogs does nothing to remove them. Imitation is not mastery.

4. Pharaoh's request is the first crack in his defiance: he asks Moses to 'plead with the LORD' (ha'tiru el-YHWH). The king who asked 'Who is the LORD?' (5:2) now acknowledges that YHWH has power he cannot match. But the concession is temporary and strategic.
5. Moses offers Pharaoh the dignity of naming the time — a gesture that simultaneously demonstrates God's power: the plague can be lifted on any schedule, proving its divine rather than natural origin.
6. 'So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God' (lema'an teda ki-ein kaYHWH Eloheinu) — the knowledge formula again. Each sign teaches the same lesson from a different angle: YHWH is incomparable.
7. The specificity of the removal — frogs departing from all locations except the Nile — shows that divine power is precise, not merely overwhelming. God controls the scope of both judgment and relief.
8. Moses 'cried out' (vayyits'aq) to the LORD — the same verb used for Israel's cry under slavery (2:23). The prophet who carries Israel's case to Pharaoh also carries Pharaoh's case to God. Intercession flows in both directions.
9. God fulfills Moses's prayer exactly, demonstrating that prophetic intercession is effective — but the response depends on God's faithfulness, not human technique.
10. The heaped dead frogs and the stinking land create a vivid image of judgment's aftermath. Relief from the plague produces its own unpleasantness — a reminder that the damage of rebellion is not instantly undone.
11. 'When Pharaoh saw relief, he hardened his heart' (vayyar Par'oh ki hayetah harevachah vehakhbed et-libbo) — the pattern is clinically precise. The moment pressure lifts, Pharaoh reneges. Crisis produces concessions; relief produces regression. The verb hakhbed ('made heavy') is the same root as Moses's 'heavy mouth.'
12. The third plague — gnats (kinnim) — comes without warning. No demand is issued to Pharaoh; no opportunity for compliance is given. The escalation introduces unannounced judgment.
13. 'All the dust of the ground became gnats' — the plague targets the very soil of Egypt. The adamah ('ground') that was the basis of Egypt's agricultural wealth is transformed into an agent of torment. Creation itself turns against the oppressor.
14. For the first time, the magicians fail. They 'could not' (lo yakhlu) replicate the sign. Their power has reached its limit — the contest is over. Egyptian magic cannot match divine authority beyond a certain threshold.
15. 'The finger of God' (etsba Elohim) — the magicians themselves recognize divine power. Their confession should persuade Pharaoh, but it does not. When even the court's own experts declare God's presence, Pharaoh's stubbornness becomes willful blindness.
16. The fourth plague introduces a new element: divine distinction between Egypt and Israel. God's judgments are now discriminating — covenant people are protected while the surrounding population bears the consequences.
17. Swarms (arov) — the exact species is debated (flies, beetles, mixed swarms), but the effect is devastating. The infestation enters houses and covers the ground, making daily life impossible.
18. 'I will set apart the land of Goshen' (vehifleti... et-erets Goshen) — the verb palah ('distinguish, set apart') is the theological key. God's judgment is not indiscriminate; it recognizes covenant relationship. 'That you may know that I, the LORD, am in the midst of the land' — God's presence among His people creates a zone of protection within the geography of judgment.
19. 'I will put a distinction between My people and your people' (vesamti pedut bein ammi uvein ammekha) — the word pedut ('redemption, ransom, distinction') suggests that covenant belonging is itself a form of redemption. Belonging to God is what distinguishes and protects.
20. The swarm comes exactly as announced — grievous and comprehensive. The ground itself is 'ruined' (tishshachet, from shachat, 'to corrupt/destroy'), using the same verb as the pre-flood corruption (Genesis 6:11-12).
21. Pharaoh's first compromise: 'sacrifice within the land.' He concedes worship but restricts location, trying to maintain control over what he cannot prevent. Each negotiation reveals the limits of his willingness.
22. Moses's refusal is practical and theological: Egyptian taboos would provoke violence if Israel sacrificed animals sacred to Egypt. The worship of YHWH cannot be conducted on Pharaoh's terms.
23. 'As He commands us' — the final authority on worship belongs to God, not to Pharaoh. Moses refuses to let the oppressor define the conditions of covenant obedience.
24. Pharaoh makes a second compromise: go, but not far. He adds 'pray for me' (ha'tiru ba'adi) — simultaneously yielding and grasping, admitting God's power while trying to limit its implications.
25. Moses warns against deceit (lo yosef Par'oh hatel) — he has already experienced Pharaoh's pattern of crisis-concession followed by relief-regression. The warning is based on experience, not suspicion.
26. Moses prays — the act of intercession is reported simply, without dramatic detail. Effective prayer does not require performance, only faithfulness.
27. God removes the swarms completely: 'not one remained.' Divine relief is as thorough as divine judgment.

28. The pattern completes itself: Pharaoh hardens his heart 'this time also' (gam bappa'am hazzot). The phrase tracks the accumulation of refusals — each one making the next more predictable and more culpable.

9

Summary: *Three more plagues strike Egypt — livestock pestilence, boils, and devastating hail. The distinction between Israel and Egypt intensifies. Pharaoh confesses 'The LORD is in the right' but hardens again once the hail stops.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The verb chazaq ('hold fast') in v2 describes Pharaoh's grip on Israel using the same root as the hardening of his heart — he grips the people the way his heart grips its stubbornness. Pharaoh's confession in v27 ('The LORD is righteous, and I and my people are wicked') is the most theologically accurate statement any antagonist makes in the entire plague narrative, yet it produces no lasting change. The hail plague introduces a new element: Egyptians who 'feared the word of the LORD' (v20) could save their servants and livestock — individual Egyptians begin responding to what Pharaoh refuses.*

Translation Friction: *The word dever ('pestilence,' v3) targeting livestock posed the question of scope — 'all the livestock of Egypt died' (v6) yet later plagues still affect Egyptian animals. We retained 'all' as the Hebrew has kol, noting in our translator notes that the severity is the point, with kol likely indicating totality within the category of livestock left in the field. The phrase kaved lev Par'oh ('Pharaoh's heart was heavy,' v7) we rendered with 'heavy' to track the kaved root consistently.*

Connections: *The pestilence on livestock targets animals associated with Egyptian deities (Hathor, Apis). Pharaoh's confession in v27 echoes the language of Deuteronomy 32:4. The hail as 'fire flashing' (v24) anticipates the theophany imagery at Sinai (19:16-18). God's purpose statement in v16 ('to show you My power') is cited by Paul in Romans 9:17.*

1Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. 2For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, 3the hand of the LORD will fall on your livestock in the field — on the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks — with a very severe pestilence. 4But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, and nothing that belongs to the sons of Israel shall die.'" 5The LORD set an appointed time, saying, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land." 6The LORD did this the next day, and all the livestock of Egypt died. But not one of the livestock of the sons of Israel died. 7Pharaoh sent and inquired, and not even one of the livestock of Israel had died. But Pharaoh's heart was heavy, and he did not let the people go. 8Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from a kiln, and let Moses throw it toward the sky in Pharaoh's sight. 9It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and it will produce boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt." 10So they took soot from a kiln and stood before Pharaoh. Moses threw it toward the sky, and it produced boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. 11The magicians were unable to appear before Moses on account of the boils, because the boils had broken out on the magicians just as on all the Egyptians. 12But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses. 13Then the LORD said to Moses, "Rise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. 14For this time I will send all My plagues on your heart and on your servants and on your people, so that you may know that there is no one like Me in all the earth. 15For by now I could have stretched out My hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been wiped from the earth. 16But for this very reason I have raised you up: to show you My power, so that My name may be proclaimed in all the earth. 17You are still exalting yourself against My people and will not let them go. 18Tomorrow at this time I will rain down the heaviest hail that has ever fallen on Egypt from the day it was founded until now. 19Now send and bring your livestock and everything you have in the field to safety. Every man and beast that is found in the field and is not brought inside will die when the hail falls on them.'" 20Those among Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their servants and their livestock inside. 21But those who did not take the word of the LORD to heart left their servants and their

livestock in the field. ²²Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, so that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt — on man and beast and every plant of the field in the land of Egypt." ²³Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran along the ground. The LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. ²⁴There was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail — very severe, such as had never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ²⁵The hail struck down everything in the field throughout the land of Egypt, both man and beast. The hail struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. ²⁶Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel lived, was there no hail. ²⁷Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, "This time I have sinned. The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. ²⁸Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer." ²⁹Moses said to him, "As soon as I leave the city, I will spread out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth belongs to the LORD. ³⁰But as for you and your servants, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God." ³¹The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. ³²But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they ripen later. ³³Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city and spread out his hands to the LORD. The thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth. ³⁴When Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned again and hardened his heart — he and his servants. ³⁵Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he did not let the sons of Israel go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The fifth plague opens with the established formula, reinforcing the cumulative weight of repeated demand and refusal.
2. 'Still hold them' (od machaziq bahem) — the verb chazaq ('hold fast, grip') is from the same root as the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. He grips Israel the way his heart grips its stubbornness.
3. The pestilence (dever) strikes livestock — Egypt's economic foundation and the animals associated with multiple Egyptian deities (Hathor the cow goddess, Apis the bull god). The plague targets both wealth and worship.
4. Again God makes a 'distinction' (hiflah) between Israel and Egypt. The covenant principle from 8:18 is reinforced: belonging to God creates a different experiential reality.
5. The 'appointed time' (mo'ed) echoes the language of covenant meetings and festivals. God sets the schedule; Pharaoh merely watches it arrive.
6. 'All the livestock of Egypt died' — the word kol ('all') may indicate totality within the category of livestock left in the field, since later plagues still affect Egyptian animals (9:19-21). The severity is the point, not necessarily absolute elimination.
7. Pharaoh investigates and confirms the distinction — Israel's livestock survived. Even empirical evidence does not penetrate his hardened heart. The verb kaved ('was heavy') tracks the progressive weight of his resistance.
8. Kiln soot (piach kivsham) — the soot comes from the very kilns where enslaved Israelites made bricks. The instrument of oppression becomes the instrument of judgment. What Pharaoh forced Israel to produce now falls on Egypt as plague.
9. Boils (shechin) attack the body itself. The plagues have moved from the natural environment (water, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock) to the human body. Each stage brings judgment closer to Pharaoh's person.
10. The sign is performed in Pharaoh's presence — publicly, undeniably.
11. The magicians who tried to replicate earlier signs now cannot even stand upright. Their professional incompetence is made personal: the boils are on their own bodies. Egypt's religious specialists are disabled by the God they failed to match.
12. For the first time the narrator says 'the LORD hardened' (vaychazzeq YHWH) rather than 'Pharaoh's heart was hard.' The agency shifts explicitly to God — judicial hardening has now overtaken Pharaoh's self-hardening. The distinction between Pharaoh choosing stubbornness and God confirming it narrows.
13. The seventh plague sequence opens with the same formula but adds unprecedented theological commentary (vv.14-16). This is the most theologically explicit pre-plague speech in Exodus.
14. 'All My plagues on your heart' (kol-maggefotai el-libbeka) — the plagues are now directed at Pharaoh's heart, the organ of resistance. The external judgments aim at internal transformation — or, failing that, at public demonstration.
15. God reveals restraint: He could have destroyed Egypt already. The continued existence of Pharaoh and his people is an act of divine patience with a purpose.

16. 'For this very reason I have raised you up' (ki ba'avur zot he'emadtikha) — one of the most theologically significant statements in the entire Pentateuch. God has positioned Pharaoh on the stage of history to display divine power and proclaim the divine name to all the earth. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:17 as evidence of God's sovereign purpose in history.
17. 'Exalting yourself against My people' (mistolel be'ammi) — the verb solal means 'to raise up, to lift high.' Pharaoh has elevated himself into the place that belongs to God. The plagues systematically dismantle that false elevation.
18. The hail is historically superlative — the worst ever in Egypt's history. The specificity ('from the day it was founded until now') anchors the plague in Egyptian time-consciousness.
19. For the first time, God offers a warning with an escape clause: bring your livestock inside and you will survive. This is mercy within judgment — God gives the opportunity to respond to His word even to the oppressor's people.
20. 'Those among Pharaoh's servants who feared the word of the LORD' — a remarkable detail. Even within the Egyptian court, some have begun to take YHWH seriously. The plagues are producing their intended effect: knowledge of the LORD, even among enemies.
21. Those who ignore the warning suffer the consequences. The choice is presented starkly: heed God's word and live, or disregard it and die. This binary will recur at Passover.
22. Moses stretches out his hand — the human agent acts at God's command, and nature obeys.
23. Thunder (qolot, literally 'voices'), hail, and fire together — a combination that previews the Sinai theophany (19:16). The storm that judges Egypt foreshadows the storm that will give the Torah.
24. 'Fire flashing in the midst of the hail' — a meteorological impossibility under normal conditions (fire and ice together), signaling supernatural origin. The narrator notes that nothing like this had occurred since Egypt's founding.
25. The hail is agricultural devastation — plants and trees destroyed. Egypt's food supply is attacked alongside its population and livestock.
26. Goshen is again exempt. The distinction (hiflah) between covenant people and Egypt is maintained through every plague.
27. Pharaoh's confession — 'I have sinned... the LORD is righteous (tsaddiq)... I and my people are the wicked ones (reshaim)' — is the most theologically accurate statement any character has made about the plague narrative. It is also the most temporary.
28. 'Enough of God's thunder' — Pharaoh wants relief from symptoms without addressing the cause. His concession targets the immediate threat, not the underlying injustice.
29. Moses offers a test: when the storm ceases, will Pharaoh keep his word? The cessation itself will prove 'that the earth belongs to the LORD' (ki laYHWH ha'arets) — a claim of universal sovereignty, not merely local power.
30. 'You do not yet fear the LORD God' — Moses identifies Pharaoh's core failure. Despite accurate confession (v27), there is no genuine yir'at YHWH ('fear of the LORD'). Words without inner transformation produce temporary concessions, not lasting change.
31. The agricultural detail — barley and flax destroyed, wheat and emmer spared because they ripen later — is precise and accurate. It both grounds the narrative in real agriculture and sets the stage for the locust plague, which will consume the late-ripening crops.
32. The surviving crops become targets for the next plague. Each judgment leaves just enough for the next one to destroy. The progression is inexorable.
33. Moses intercedes, and God responds — the prophetic cycle of plague, negotiation, intercession, and relief continues.
34. 'He sinned again and hardened his heart' (vayyosef lachato vayyakhbed et-libbo) — the verb yasaf ('add, do again') counts the accumulation of guilt. Each regression is an additional sin, not merely a repetition.
35. The chapter closes with the fulfillment formula: everything happens 'just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.' God's word controls the narrative; Pharaoh's resistance cannot alter the outcome.

10

Summary: Locusts devour everything the hail spared, then a darkness so thick it can be felt covers Egypt for three days while Israel has light. Pharaoh's own servants urge him to relent. After the darkness, Pharaoh threatens Moses with death if he returns.

What Makes This Remarkable: The exodus is explicitly designed for intergenerational testimony: 'that you may recount in the hearing of your son and grandson' (v2). The verb sapper is the origin of the Passover Haggadah — the story is not merely record but ongoing encounter. The darkness plague (choshekh, v21) inverts creation itself: Genesis 1:3-4 separated light from darkness, but now darkness returns as judgment. Pharaoh's servants break ranks before he does (v7), exposing the isolation of tyranny.

Translation Friction: The phrase choshekh afeilah ('thick darkness,' v22) we rendered as 'darkness that could be felt,' preserving the tactile quality the Hebrew seems to intend. The root anah in le'anot mipanai ('to humble yourself before Me,' v3) is the same root that describes Israel's affliction under Egypt — we noted this bitter wordplay in our translator notes. The phrase 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself?' names Pharaoh's core sin: the oppressor who humiliated a nation will not humble himself before God.

Connections: The darkness reverses Genesis 1:3-4. The intergenerational telling (v2) grounds the Passover Haggadah tradition. Pharaoh's advisors breaking ranks (v7) parallels Nebuchadnezzar's advisors in Daniel 2:2-12. The three days of darkness anticipate the three days of preparation at Sinai (19:11).

1Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, so that I may place these signs of Mine among them, 2and so that you may recount in the hearing of your son and grandson how I dealt severely with Egypt and what signs I placed among them — that you may know that I am the LORD." 3So Moses and Aaron went in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, so that they may serve Me. 4For if you refuse to let My people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory. 5They shall cover the surface of the ground so that no one will be able to see the ground. They shall eat what remains to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field. 6They shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and the houses of all the Egyptians — something that neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen, from the day they came to be on the earth until this day." Then Moses turned and went out from Pharaoh. 7Pharaoh's servants said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the men go so that they may serve the LORD their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?" 8So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, "Go, serve the LORD your God. But exactly who will be going?" 9Moses said, "We will go with our young and our old, with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." 10Pharaoh said to them, "The LORD had better be with you if I ever let you and your little ones go! Clearly, you have evil in mind. 11No! Go now, you men, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking." And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence. 12Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, so that they may come upon the land of Egypt and eat every plant in the land — all that the hail has left." 13So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind over the land all that day and all that night. When morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. 14The locusts came up over all the land of Egypt and settled on the entire territory of Egypt — a very dense swarm. Never before had there been so many locusts, and never again would there be. 15They covered the surface of the whole land so that the land was darkened. They ate every plant in the land and every fruit of the trees that the hail had left. Not a green thing remained, neither tree nor plant of the field, throughout all the land of Egypt. 16Then Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you. 17Now please forgive my sin just this once, and plead with the LORD your God to remove this death from me." 18Moses went out from Pharaoh and pleaded with the LORD. 19The LORD turned a very strong west wind that picked up the locusts and drove them into the Sea of Reeds. Not a single locust remained in all the territory of Egypt. 20But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go. 21Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt — a darkness that can be felt." 22So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and there was thick darkness throughout all the land of Egypt for three days. 23They could not see one another, and no one rose from his place for three days. But all the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings. 24Then Pharaoh called Moses and said, "Go, serve the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your little ones may go with you." 25But Moses said, "You yourself must give us sacrifices and burnt offerings so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God. 26Our livestock also must go with us — not a hoof shall be left behind. For we must take from them to serve the LORD our God, and we ourselves do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there." 27But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. 28Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me! Be careful never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die." 29Moses said, "You have spoken rightly. I will not see your face again."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. God explicitly claims the hardening as His own action: 'I have hardened' (ani hikhbadti). The purpose is stated: 'so that I may place these signs.' The plagues are divine pedagogy — each one a lesson placed (shiti, 'set, placed') before Pharaoh and Israel alike.
2. The exodus is designed for intergenerational testimony: 'that you may recount in the hearing of your son and grandson.' The story is not merely historical record but ongoing pedagogical event. Each generation is expected to retell what God did — and through telling, to encounter the God who acts.
3. 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me?' (ad-matai me'anta le'anot mipanai) — God names Pharaoh's core sin: refusal to humble himself (le'anot, from anah). The same root describes Israel's affliction (inui) under Egyptian oppression. The oppressor who refuses to humble himself has humiliated an entire nation.
4. Locusts (arbeh) represent agricultural apocalypse — a plague that consumes what the hail spared. The progression is strategic: each plague targets what survived the previous one.
5. 'Cover the surface of the ground so that no one can see the ground' — the locusts create a living carpet. The verb kasah ('cover') will be used of the sea covering the Egyptian army (14:28). What covers the land now previews what will cover the oppressor later.
6. The plague exceeds ancestral memory: 'neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen.' The historical superlative underscores uniqueness — this is not a natural cycle but a divine act without precedent.
7. Pharaoh's own servants now advocate release — 'Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?' (haterem teda ki avdah Mitsrayim). The verb yada ('know/realize') echoes the knowledge theme throughout: Egypt is being forced to 'know' the LORD, and even the court recognizes the catastrophe before the king does.
8. Pharaoh negotiates: 'Exactly who will be going?' (mi vami haholkhim). He attempts to limit the departure to adult males, retaining women, children, and livestock as hostages ensuring return.
9. Moses insists on totality: 'young and old, sons and daughters, flocks and herds.' Covenant worship involves the whole community — no one and nothing is left behind. The word chag ('feast') requires communal, comprehensive participation.
10. Pharaoh's response is sarcastic and threatening: 'The LORD had better be with you if I ever let your little ones go!' He reads the request as a cover for flight and accuses Moses of evil intent (ra'ah). Pharaoh attributes to Israel the very malice he himself practices.
11. 'Go now, you men' (lekhu-na haggevarim) — Pharaoh's counter-offer restricts worship to adult males, stripping it of familial and communal dimensions. This is worship on Pharaoh's terms, which is not worship at all. Moses and Aaron are 'driven out' (vayegaresh) — the verb used for expulsion, not departure.
12. God commands the eighth plague. The locusts will eat 'all that the hail has left' — the judgment is cumulative. Each plague builds on the destruction of the last.
13. The east wind (ruach qadim) carries the locusts — natural meteorology serves divine purpose. The same ruach ('wind/spirit') that hovered over creation waters (Genesis 1:2) now drives judgment across Egypt. An east wind will later part the sea (14:21).
14. 'Never before and never again' — the double superlative marks this as an unrepeatable event, a unique divine act within history.
15. Total coverage, total darkness of the land, total consumption of vegetation. The threefold totality mirrors the three-day darkness that follows. Egypt's agricultural wealth, already battered by hail, is now entirely consumed.
16. Pharaoh's second confession of sin (cf. 9:27): 'I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you.' The confession acknowledges both divine and human dimensions of his offense. But as before, the words are crisis-driven.
17. 'Remove this death from me' (veyaser me'alai raq et-hammavet hazzeh) — Pharaoh calls the locusts 'this death.' The economic destruction is existential; without crops, Egypt faces famine. His request uses the word raq ('only, just'), minimizing his plea to immediate relief rather than genuine repentance.
18. Moses intercedes without conditions or commentary. The prophet prays; God acts.
19. The LORD sends a west wind (ruach-yam, literally 'sea wind') that sweeps every locust into the Sea of Reeds (yam-suf). The Sea of Reeds receives the locusts here; it will receive the Egyptian army later. The geographic detail foreshadows the climax of the exodus.
20. 'The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart' — by this point the hardening formula has become a refrain. The pattern is fixed: plague, confession, relief, re-hardening.
21. 'A darkness that can be felt' (choshekh va'yamesh choshekh) — the darkness is tangible, palpable. This is not merely the absence of light but a presence in itself. The language echoes the primordial darkness of Genesis 1:2 — Egypt is being un-created, returned to the formless void that preceded God's ordering work.
22. Three days of impenetrable darkness — Egypt's supreme deity, Ra the sun god, is rendered powerless. The plague directly confronts Egypt's highest theological claim: the sun god is sovereign. For three days, Ra does not rise. YHWH has eclipsed Egypt's god.

23. 'All the sons of Israel had light in their dwellings' — the Goshen distinction reaches its most vivid expression. Light and darkness coexist in the same land, divided by covenant. Israel's light is not natural but providential.
24. Pharaoh's final compromise: go and worship, leave your livestock. Each negotiation has conceded more: first location (8:21), then distance (8:24), then participants (10:11), now livestock. But each concession still falls short of total release.
25. Moses refuses any compromise: 'You yourself must give us sacrifices.' The demand escalates — not only will Israel take its own animals, but Pharaoh must contribute to the worship of YHWH. The oppressor will fund the worship of the God who judges him.
26. 'Not a hoof shall be left behind' (parsah lo tishsha'er) — absolute language that refuses every form of partial compliance. Moses's certainty about the non-negotiable nature of total departure contrasts with his confession of uncertainty about details: 'we do not know with what we must serve the LORD until we arrive there.'
27. The hardening formula recurs. God's judicial confirmation of Pharaoh's resistance continues to its conclusion.
28. 'On the day you see my face you shall die' — Pharaoh issues a death threat. The face-to-face confrontation has reached its limit. Pharaoh banishes Moses permanently from his presence.
29. 'You have spoken rightly' (ken dibbarta) — Moses accepts the finality without protest. He will not see Pharaoh's face again — but Pharaoh will see God's hand one more time, in the death of the firstborn.

11

Summary: God announces the final plague: at midnight He will go through Egypt, and every firstborn will die, from Pharaoh's heir to the slave woman's child. A great cry will rise from Egypt, but Israel will be untouched. Moses departs from Pharaoh in fierce anger.

What Makes This Remarkable: The measure-for-measure theology reaches its climax: the cry (tse'aqah gedolah) that will rise from Egypt uses the same word for Israel's cry under slavery (3:7, 9). The oppressor's grief mirrors the grief they inflicted. God Himself walks through Egypt at midnight ('I will go out,' ani yotse, v4) — this is direct divine action at the most liminal hour, not delegated judgment. The chapter also reveals that Moses had become 'very great' (gadol me'od) in Egypt, an ironic reversal of Pharaoh's attempt to crush Israel's leaders.

Translation Friction: The Hebrew bechor ('firstborn') carries weight that no single English word captures — it denotes inheritance rights, succession, family identity, and the father's primary claim. We retained 'firstborn' but relied on the translator notes to unpack the theological freight, especially the connection to God's declaration in 4:22 ('Israel is My firstborn'). The verb garesh yegaresh ('he will surely drive you out,' v1) uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis; we rendered this as 'drive you out completely.'

Connections: The firstborn-for-firstborn logic fulfills the warning of 4:22-23. The great cry echoes 3:7 and 9. The plundering of Egyptian gold and silver (v2) was promised in 3:21-22 and will supply the tabernacle in chapters 25-31. The phrase 'not a dog shall growl' (v7) expresses the totality of God's protective distinction.

1The LORD said to Moses, "One more plague I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt. After that he will let you go from here. When he lets you go, he will drive you out completely. 2Speak now in the hearing of the people, and let each man ask of his neighbor and each woman of her neighbor for articles of silver and articles of gold." 3The LORD caused the Egyptians to regard the people favorably. Moses himself had become a figure of great prominence throughout Egypt, respected by Pharaoh's officials and by the common people alike. 4Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through the midst of Egypt, 5and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the slave woman who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock. 6There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been and such as there shall never be again. 7But against any of the sons of Israel not even a dog shall growl, against neither man nor beast, so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. 8All these servants of yours shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, 'Go out, you and all the people who follow you.' After that I will go out." And he went out from Pharaoh in fierce anger. 9The LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh will not listen to you, so that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt." 10Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he

did not let the sons of Israel go out of his land.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'One more plague' (nega echad od) — God numbers the remaining judgment: exactly one. The finality is deliberate. After this, Pharaoh will not merely release Israel; he will 'drive them out completely' (garesh yegaresh, infinitive absolute for emphasis). The oppressor will become the expeller.
2. The instruction to 'ask' (sha'al) of Egyptian neighbors for silver and gold is the same verb used when Israel 'asked' Pharaoh for permission to worship. What Pharaoh refused, the Egyptians will grant. The slave-wages of centuries will be collected in a single night.
3. 'The LORD gave the people favor' (vayyitten YHWH et-chen ha'am) — chen ('favor, grace') is divinely granted, not humanly earned. Even Moses's reputation is noted: 'very great' (gadol me'od) in Egypt's eyes. The deliverer whom Pharaoh dismissed has become the most significant figure in the land.
4. 'About midnight I will go out through the midst of Egypt' (kachatsi hallailah ani yotse betokh Mitsrayim) — God Himself walks through Egypt. The verb yotse ('go out') is first person: I will go out. This is not delegated to an angel or a plague mechanism; it is direct divine action at the most liminal hour.
5. The scope of the tenth plague is comprehensive: from the throne to the slave quarters, from royal heir to the captive's child. The firstborn represents the future of every household — and every future in Egypt is forfeit. The livestock firstborn are included, extending judgment to Egypt's economic and religious symbols.
6. 'A great cry' (tse'aqah gedolah) — the same word used for Israel's cry under slavery (3:7, 9). The oppressor will now cry with the same anguish they inflicted. The echo is measure-for-measure: the cry of the enslaved becomes the cry of the bereaved.
7. 'Not even a dog shall growl' (lo yecherats kelev leshono) — an idiom for absolute peace and safety. While Egypt screams in grief, Israel will experience undisturbed quiet. The contrast could not be sharper. The verb palah ('make a distinction') returns from 8:18 and 9:4 — God's judgments are discriminating, not indiscriminate.
8. Moses predicts that Pharaoh's own servants will come bowing to him, begging Israel to leave. The power dynamic that opened Exodus (Israel bowing to Pharaoh) will be completely reversed. Moses leaves 'in fierce anger' (bachari-af) — the only time Moses's personal anger at Pharaoh is recorded.
9. God reframes Pharaoh's stubbornness as serving divine purpose: 'so that My wonders may be multiplied.' Every refusal has extended the revelation. The plagues are not merely punitive but pedagogical — each one teaches Egypt and Israel who YHWH is.
10. The summary verse closes the plague cycle with the fulfillment formula. Moses and Aaron obeyed; God hardened; Pharaoh refused. The three actors have played their appointed roles. The stage is now set for the Passover.

12

Summary: *God institutes the Passover: each household slaughters a lamb at twilight, applies blood to the doorposts, and eats in haste with sandals on. At midnight the LORD strikes every Egyptian firstborn. Pharaoh finally drives Israel out, and they leave after 430 years, plundering Egypt.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Passover resets Israel's calendar — 'this month shall be the beginning of months for you' (v2). Liberation redefines time itself. The word tamim ('without blemish,' v5) describing the lamb is the same word used for Noah's character (Genesis 6:9) and Abraham's covenant walk (Genesis 17:1) — physical wholeness in the offering symbolizes moral wholeness. The communal timing (bein ha'arbaim, 'between the evenings') means every household acts simultaneously; the Passover is a national act, not a private one.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase bein ha'arbaim ('at twilight,' v6) — literally 'between the evenings' — has been debated in Jewish tradition for centuries. We rendered it 'at twilight' as the most accessible reading. The word edah ('congregation,' v3) appears for the first time in Exodus, and we retained 'congregation' to mark the shift from family units to a constituted community. The blood on the doorposts functions as a sign (ot) for the LORD, not as a magical ward — our rendering preserves this theological distinction.*

Connections: *The Passover lamb anticipates Isaiah 53:7 and John 1:29. The blood on the doorposts connects to the covenant blood of 24:8. The 430 years fulfill Genesis 15:13-16. The command to retell the story (v26-27) grounds the Passover Haggadah tradition. Paul identifies Christ as 'our Passover lamb' in 1 Corinthians 5:7.*

¹The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ²"This month will mark the beginning of months for you. It will be the first month of your year. ³Speak to the whole congregation of Israel, saying: On the tenth day of this month, each man shall take a lamb for his father's household — a lamb for each household. ⁴If the household is too small for a lamb, he and his nearest neighbor shall take one according to the number of persons. According to what each can eat, you shall apportion the lamb. ⁵Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, and the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. ⁷They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted over fire, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ⁹Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over fire — its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰You shall not leave any of it until morning. Whatever remains until morning you shall burn with fire. ¹¹This is how you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover. ¹²I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast. Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am the LORD. ¹³The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live. When I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴This day shall be a memorial for you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD. Throughout your generations you shall celebrate it as an eternal ordinance. ¹⁵Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. Whoever eats anything leavened from the first day to the seventh day — that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶On the first day there shall be a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days, except what is needed for each person to eat — that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. You shall observe this day throughout your generations as an eternal ordinance. ¹⁸In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. ¹⁹For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses. Whoever eats what is leavened — that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether sojourner or native of the land. ²⁰You shall eat nothing leavened. In all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread." ²¹Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go and select lambs for your families, and slaughter the Passover lamb. ²²Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. ²³For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. ²⁴You shall observe this as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. ²⁵When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶When your children say to you, 'What does this service mean to you?' ²⁷you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for He passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians but delivered our households.'" And the people bowed their heads and worshipped. ²⁸The sons of Israel went and did so. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ²⁹At midnight the LORD struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰Pharaoh rose in the night — he and all his servants and all the Egyptians — and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. ³¹He summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Rise up, go out from among my people, both you and the sons of Israel! Go, serve the LORD, as you have said. ³²Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and go — and bless me also." ³³The Egyptians pressed the people hard, urging them to leave the land quickly, for they said, "We shall all be dead." ³⁴So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵The sons of Israel had done as Moses told them: they had asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and articles of gold and for clothing. ³⁶The LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. ³⁷The sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸A mixed multitude also went up with them, along with very many flocks and herds of livestock. ³⁹They baked the dough that they had brought out of Egypt into unleavened cakes, for it

was not leavened — because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, and they had not prepared any provisions for themselves. ⁴⁰The time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. ⁴¹At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴²It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. This same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the sons of Israel throughout their generations. ⁴³The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴but every slave purchased with silver, after you have circumcised him, may eat of it. ⁴⁵A temporary resident and a hired worker shall not eat of it. ⁴⁶It shall be eaten in one house. You shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷The whole congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸If a sojourner lives with you and wants to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then he may come near and keep it. He shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹There shall be one law for the native and for the sojourner who lives among you." ⁵⁰All the sons of Israel did so. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. ⁵¹On that very day the LORD brought the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Passover instructions begin with a joint address to Moses and Aaron — the prophetic and priestly partners together receive the foundational ritual of Israel's identity.
2. God resets Israel's calendar: this month (Nisan/Aviv) becomes 'the beginning of months.' The exodus does not merely change Israel's location; it redefines time itself. History begins again at liberation.
3. 'The whole congregation of Israel' (kol-adat Yisra'el) — the word edah ('congregation, assembly') appears here for the first time in Exodus. The Passover is communal from its origin: no individual observance, only household and congregational participation.
4. The provision for shared households ensures that no one is excluded by poverty or family size. The Passover lamb must be consumed entirely — waste is prohibited, and sufficiency is calculated per person (lefi okhlo, 'according to what each can eat').
5. 'Without blemish' (tamim) — the same word used for Noah's character (Genesis 6:9) and Abraham's walk before God (Genesis 17:1). The sacrificial animal must have the integrity that the covenant demands of persons. Physical wholeness in the offering symbolizes moral wholeness in the worshiper.
6. 'The whole assembled congregation shall slaughter it at twilight' (bein ha'arbayim) — literally 'between the evenings,' a phrase debated in Jewish tradition (either between noon and sunset, or between sunset and dark). The communal timing means every household in Israel acts simultaneously. The Passover is a national act, not a private one.
7. Blood on the doorposts and lintel marks the household as belonging to God. The blood is not hidden inside but displayed publicly — a visible covenant sign that declares allegiance and receives protection. The doorframe becomes the boundary between judgment and safety.
8. Three elements define the Passover meal: roasted lamb (the sacrifice), unleavened bread (matzot, the bread of haste), and bitter herbs (merorim, the taste of slavery). Each element carries embodied memory — the meal is not merely eaten but experienced as a re-entry into the exodus.
9. The prohibition against raw or boiled preparation insists on roasting over fire. Fire is the element of theophany (burning bush, pillar of fire, Sinai) and of sacrifice (olah). The lamb is prepared the way offerings are prepared — wholly given to fire.
10. Nothing may remain until morning — the sacrifice must be consumed completely or burned. Leftovers would become common food, losing their sacred status. The urgency of the meal reflects the urgency of the departure.
11. The posture of eating — belt fastened, sandals on, staff in hand — is the posture of departure. The meal is eaten standing and ready, not reclined in leisure. 'It is the LORD's Passover' (pesach hu laYHWH) — the name pesach is formally introduced here.
12. God Himself passes through Egypt: 'I will pass through... I will strike... I will execute judgments.' Three first-person declarations. The tenth plague is not delegated — it is direct divine action. 'Against all the gods of Egypt' (uvkhol-elohei Mitsrayim) reveals the theological dimension: the plagues are a systematic dismantling of Egypt's entire divine order.
13. 'When I see the blood, I will pass over you' (ura'ti et-haddam ufasachtu aleikhem) — the verb pasach gives the festival its name. Its meaning is debated: 'pass over' (skip), 'protect' (hover over and shield), or 'have compassion.' All three meanings converge: God sees the blood, protects the household, and passes over in judgment. The blood does not inform God of who lives there — He already knows. It functions as a covenant sign, marking the household as His.
14. 'A memorial' (zikkaron) — the Passover is designed for remembrance across generations. The word zikkaron carries active force: not merely recalling the past but making it present. Each generation that observes the Passover enters the exodus anew.
15. Leaven (chamets) represents the old life — Egypt's bread, Egypt's culture, Egypt's slavery. Removing leaven from the house is a ritual enactment of leaving Egypt behind. The penalty for eating leavened bread during the festival is severe: 'cut off from Israel' (nikhretah), the most serious communal

sanction.

16. 'Holy assembly' (miqra qodesh) — the word miqra means 'a calling, a convocation.' It is not merely an assembly but a summoned gathering — God calls His people together. The frame of the festival (first and seventh days) is sacred rest, mirroring the creation pattern of work and sabbath.
17. 'On this very day' (be'etsem hayyom hazzeh) — the same phrase used for Noah entering the ark (Genesis 7:13) and Abraham's circumcision (Genesis 17:23, 26). It marks events of absolute, calendared precision — this day, not approximately.
18. The dates are precise: evening of the fourteenth to evening of the twenty-first. Seven full days of unleavened bread. The precision reflects the conviction that sacred time is measured, not vague.
19. The prohibition extends to 'sojourner or native' — universally binding within the community. The word ger ('sojourner') includes non-Israelites who have joined the community. Covenant boundaries are permeable to those who enter, but the requirements are non-negotiable for all who belong.
20. The instruction closes with a restatement: eat nothing leavened, eat unleavened bread in all dwellings. The repetition is characteristic of legal instruction in the Torah — ensuring no ambiguity remains.
21. Moses transmits the divine instructions to the elders, using the practical verb mashakh ('draw out, select') for choosing the lambs. The transition from divine speech to human action begins here.
22. Hyssop (ezov) is a small plant used for sprinkling — humble vegetation applied to the loftiest purpose. It will reappear in Levitical purification rites (Leviticus 14:4, 6) and in David's prayer of repentance (Psalm 51:7). The blood applied by hyssop marks the threshold between death and life.
23. 'The LORD will pass over the door' (ufasach YHWH al-happetach) — the verb pasach is now applied to God's protective action at each doorway. 'The destroyer' (hammashchit) appears as a distinct agent of judgment — whether an angel or a personification of the plague force, the text distinguishes this figure from God Himself, who controls and limits the destruction.
24. 'Forever' (ad-olam) — the Passover is not a one-time emergency measure but a permanent institution. The word olam stretches the observance beyond any visible horizon. What began in a single night of terror becomes Israel's defining annual act.
25. The instructions anticipate settlement in the land — the Passover will be kept not only in Egypt's shadow but in the promised land itself. Covenant memory travels with the people into their future.
26. 'When your children say to you, What does this service mean?' — the liturgical question is built into the institution. The Passover is designed to provoke inquiry from the next generation. Every child who asks 'Why?' receives the exodus narrative as answer. This is theology transmitted through curiosity, not coercion.
27. The answer links three acts: sacrifice, passing over, and deliverance. The people respond with worship — 'bowed their heads and worshipped' (vayyiqqdu vayyishtachavu). Faith precedes the event: they worship before the firstborn die, before the blood is tested, before deliverance comes.
28. The obedience formula: 'just as the LORD had commanded... so they did.' Israel's first corporate act of covenant obedience since entering Egypt. After centuries of slavery, they act as a free people obeying their God.
29. 'At midnight' (bachatsi hallailah) — the hour God promised in 11:4. The blow falls with clockwork precision. From the throne to the dungeon, every household is struck. The comprehensiveness fulfills the announcement exactly.
30. 'There was not a house where someone was not dead' (ki-ein bayit asher ein-sham met) — the universality of the judgment is stated in the starkest possible terms. Pharaoh's house, the servant's house, the prisoner's house — all are bereaved. The 'great cry' (tse'aqah gedolah) echoes Israel's own cry under slavery (2:23; 3:7).
31. Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron 'by night' (lailah) — the king who said 'I will not let Israel go' (5:2) and 'Get away from me' (10:28) now begs them to leave. Every condition he previously imposed is abandoned: go, serve, take everything.
32. 'Bless me also' (uverakhtem gam-oti) — Pharaoh, who asked 'Who is the LORD?' (5:2), now asks Moses for a blessing from that same LORD. The reversal is complete. The one who refused to acknowledge God now seeks God's favor through the very people he enslaved.
33. The Egyptians are desperate: 'We shall all be dead' (kullanu metim). The fear of total annihilation drives them to expel Israel urgently. What Pharaoh would not do willingly, the Egyptian people now do in terror.
34. Unleavened dough carried on shoulders — the bread that had no time to rise becomes the central symbol of the festival. Hasty departure is memorialized in the food itself. The people leave as they ate: in haste, carrying what they have, ready for the road.
35. The 'asking' (sha'al) from the Egyptians fulfills the promise of 3:21-22. Israel does not steal; they ask, and the Egyptians give willingly — driven by fear, but also by the divinely granted chen ('favor') mentioned in 11:3.
36. 'They plundered the Egyptians' (vayenatslu et-Mitsrayim) — the verb natsal means to strip, to plunder, to despoil. The same word used for God 'delivering' Israel (3:8; 6:6) is now used for Israel 'stripping' Egypt. Deliverance and despoilment share a verb — what was taken from Israel in labor is now reclaimed in departure.
37. 'About six hundred thousand men on foot' (keshesh-me'ot elef ragli) — this number has been extensively debated. The word eleph can mean 'thousand' or 'clan/military unit.' If read as 'thousand,' the total population exceeds two million; if read as 'clan,' the number is considerably smaller. The text records the tradition without resolving the question.

38. 'A mixed multitude' (erev rav) — non-Israelites who joined the exodus. The departure is not ethnically exclusive; others attached themselves to Israel's liberation. This group will later cause problems (Numbers 11:4), but their inclusion here reflects the gravitational pull of God's redemptive act.
39. The unleavened cakes are explained by narrative circumstance: they were driven out and could not wait. The ritual institution (vv.15-20) is grounded in historical reality — the bread of haste was not a theological invention but a lived necessity that became a sacrament.
40. '430 years' — the precise duration of the sojourn, fulfilling the prophecy of 400 years given to Abraham in Genesis 15:13 (the 30-year difference reflects different starting points for the count). The narrator anchors the exodus in measurable, historical time.
41. 'On that very day' (be'etsem hayyom hazzeh) — the phrase of calendared precision returns. The 430 years end on a specific day, not approximately. 'All the hosts of the LORD' (kol-tziv'ot YHWH) — Israel is again called God's army, departing Egypt as a military force under divine command.
42. 'A night of watching' (leil shimmurim) — the word shimmurim (from shamar, 'to watch, guard, keep') is used in an unusual intensive plural. This night is doubly watched: God watched over Israel to bring them out, and Israel watches this night in commemoration across all generations. The watching is mutual — God guards; Israel remembers.
43. Passover regulations resume, now addressing membership: who may eat and who may not. The festival creates community boundaries — it is not open to everyone indiscriminately but requires covenant belonging.
44. A purchased slave, once circumcised, may eat — the covenant sign of circumcision grants access to the covenant meal. Social status (slave) does not exclude; covenant status (circumcised) includes.
45. Temporary residents (toshav) and hired workers (sakhir) are excluded — those with no permanent covenant commitment cannot share the covenant meal. The Passover requires belonging, not mere proximity.
46. 'You shall not break any of its bones' (ve'etsem lo tishberu-vo) — the intact skeleton preserves the wholeness of the sacrifice. John 19:36 will cite this verse in connection with Jesus's crucifixion, where the soldiers do not break his legs. The unbroken bones signify an offering given whole and complete.
47. 'The whole congregation of Israel shall keep it' — the Passover is mandatory for the entire community. No opt-out is provided. Corporate identity is forged in corporate observance.
48. The provision for the sojourner (ger) who wants to participate is remarkable: circumcision grants full access. 'He shall be as a native of the land' (vehayah ke'ezrach ha'arets) — the covenant community is not closed by ethnicity but opened by covenant commitment. Circumcision is the gate.
49. 'One law for the native and for the sojourner' (torah achat... la'ezrach velagger) — one of the most important legal principles in the Torah. The same standard applies to all who belong to the covenant community, regardless of origin. Equality before the law is established at the exodus.
50. The obedience formula repeats: 'just as the LORD commanded... so they did.' Bracketing the chapter (v28 and v50) with identical compliance statements frames the entire Passover night within perfect obedience.
51. 'The LORD brought the sons of Israel out' (hotsi YHWH et-benei Yisra'el) — the chapter's final sentence is the exodus itself, stated in a single clause. God is the subject; Israel is the object. Liberation is divine action, and the verb hotsi ('brought out') will become the defining verb of Israel's identity.

13

Summary: God commands the consecration of every firstborn and the observance of unleavened bread as a perpetual memorial. Moses carries Joseph's bones as promised. God leads Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, deliberately avoiding the Philistine road.

What Makes This Remarkable: The verb qaddesh ('consecrate,' v2) transfers every firstborn from common status to divine ownership — they are living memorials of the tenth plague. The imperative zakhor ('remember,' v3) is not mere mental recall but active, liturgical remembrance, the same verb governing the Sabbath commandment (20:8). God's strategic routing away from the Philistine road (v17) reveals that liberation includes protection from premature conflict — 'lest the people change their minds when they see war.'

Translation Friction: We rendered qaddesh-li kol-bekhor as 'consecrate to Me every firstborn' rather than 'sanctify' or 'set apart,' because 'consecrate' best captures the transfer of ownership from human to divine use. The phrase beit avadim ('house of slavery,' v3) we treated as a fixed title for Egypt that recurs throughout the Torah. The month name Aviv ('spring') carries agricultural resonance — the exodus coincides with new grain — which the English 'Aviv' preserves better than a translation like 'spring month.'

Connections: The consecration of the firstborn connects to Numbers 3:11-13, where Levites substitute for firstborn. Joseph's bones (v19) fulfill Genesis 50:25 and find their resting place in Joshua 24:32. The pillar of cloud and fire anticipates God's presence in the tabernacle (40:34-38) and Isaiah's vision of a canopy over Zion (Isaiah 4:5).

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Consecrate to Me every firstborn. Whatever opens the womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and of beast — it is Mine." ³Moses said to the people, "Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴Today you are going out, in the month of Aviv. ⁵When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which He swore to your fathers to give you — a land flowing with milk and honey — you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast, and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. ⁷Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. No leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹It shall be as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, so that the instruction of the LORD may be in your mouth, for with a strong hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰You shall keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year. ¹¹"When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, ¹²you shall set apart to the LORD every firstborn that opens the womb. Every firstborn male of your livestock belongs to the LORD. ¹³Every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, and if you do not redeem it, you shall break its neck. Every firstborn among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴When your son asks you in time to come, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹⁵When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.' ¹⁶It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt." ¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near. For God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt." ¹⁸So God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Sea of Reeds. The sons of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle. ¹⁹Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you." ²⁰The y set out from Succoth and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness. ²¹The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day and by night. ²²The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. A new divine speech opens the firstborn consecration legislation, directly following the death of Egypt's firstborn in chapter 12.
2. 'Consecrate to Me every firstborn' (qaddesh-li kol-bekhor) — the verb qiddesh ('consecrate, set apart as holy') is from the root qadosh. Because God struck Egypt's firstborn to liberate Israel, every firstborn in Israel now belongs to God. The firstborn are living memorials of the tenth plague: their life was purchased by Egypt's loss.
3. 'Remember this day' (zakhor et-hayyom hazzeh) — the imperative zakhor ('remember') is not mere mental recall but active, liturgical remembrance. The same verb governs the Sabbath commandment (20:8). 'House of slavery' (beit avadim) becomes a fixed phrase for Egypt throughout the Torah.
4. The month of Aviv (later called Nisan) means 'spring' — the month of new grain. The exodus occurs at the season of agricultural renewal, linking national liberation to the natural cycle of new life.
5. The land promise is restated with the standard six-nation list, reminding Israel that the exodus is not an end but a means: liberation leads to land, and land is the space where covenant worship is practiced.
6. The seven-day unleavened bread observance is repeated from chapter 12. The repetition is characteristic of Torah legislation — critical instructions are stated, restated, and amplified to ensure no ambiguity.
7. The triple prohibition — no leavened bread eaten, no leavened bread seen, no leaven seen — escalates from consumption to visibility to possession. The removal of leaven is total.

8. 'You shall tell your son' (vehiggadta levinkha) — the verb higgid ('tell, declare, narrate') is the root of the word haggadah, the Passover retelling. The instruction embeds intergenerational narration into the festival's structure. Faith is transmitted through story.
9. 'A sign on your hand and a memorial between your eyes' — this phrase will later be interpreted literally as tefillin (phylacteries) in rabbinic tradition. In the Torah's own context, it expresses the principle that the exodus should govern both action (hand) and thought (between the eyes). The phrase 'instruction of the LORD' (torat YHWH) is the first use of the word torah in Exodus — here meaning 'teaching, instruction' in its broadest sense.
10. The statute has an 'appointed time' (mo'ed) — the same word used for the sacred calendar and for the tabernacle ('tent of meeting,' ohel mo'ed). Time, place, and practice are all governed by divine appointment.
11. The firstborn legislation is tied to entry into the land — the law takes full effect when Israel settles. Wilderness observance anticipates settled practice.
12. 'Set apart to the LORD' (veha'avarta laYHWH) — the verb avar in the hipil means 'cause to pass over,' creating a wordplay with pesach. What was 'passed over' in Egypt is now 'passed over to' God. Every firstborn that opens the womb (peter rechem) is claimed by the God who opened the way through Egypt.
13. Donkeys cannot be sacrificed (they are not clean animals), so they must be redeemed with a lamb — a substitute. If not redeemed, their neck is broken. Human firstborn are always redeemed, never sacrificed. The redemption requirement establishes the principle that human life belongs to God but is never taken as offering.
14. The second 'when your son asks' passage (cf. 12:26). The Passover creates perpetual curiosity — each generation asks why, and each generation receives the narrative of liberation as answer.
15. The answer links the firstborn consecration to Pharaoh's stubbornness and the tenth plague. The logic is explicit: because Pharaoh would not release God's firstborn (Israel), God struck Egypt's firstborn. Therefore Israel's firstborn are consecrated — set apart as living testimony to the cost of liberation.
16. The 'sign on your hand and frontlets between your eyes' phrase repeats from v9, creating a literary frame around the firstborn legislation. The physical body carries the exodus memory.
17. God chooses the long route — not the direct coastal road through Philistine territory (the Way of Horus, a major military highway). The reason is pastoral: God knows His people are not yet ready for war. Divine strategy accounts for human weakness.
18. 'The Sea of Reeds' (yam-suf) — traditionally rendered 'Red Sea,' but the Hebrew suf means 'reeds' or 'rushes.' The exact location is debated, but the name points to a marshy body of water, not necessarily the modern Red Sea. 'Equipped for battle' (chamushim) indicates military organization despite the avoidance of the direct military route.
19. Moses carries Joseph's bones — fulfilling the oath from Genesis 50:25. The dead patriarch travels with the living nation. Joseph, who entered Egypt as a slave and rose to power, now leaves as bones carried by the people he preserved. The continuity of covenant promise bridges the gap between Genesis and Exodus.
20. The itinerary moves from Rameses (12:37) to Succoth to Etham, tracking the departure route. 'The edge of the wilderness' (biqtseh hammidbar) marks the transition from settled Egyptian territory to the wilderness where God will lead, feed, and teach Israel.
21. The pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night are the visible manifestation of God's guidance. Cloud and fire are theophany elements (cf. Sinai, 19:18; the tabernacle, 40:34-38). God does not merely command the route; He physically leads the march. The dual manifestation ensures continuous guidance — day and night, without interruption.
22. 'Did not depart' (lo yamish) — the constancy of God's presence is emphasized. The pillar is not intermittent but permanent. As long as Israel journeys, God's visible presence goes before them. This is the Shekinah concept in narrative form: God dwelling with and leading His people.

14

Summary: *God leads Israel into an apparent trap between the sea and the wilderness. Pharaoh pursues with his full army. God parts the sea, Israel crosses on dry ground, and the returning waters destroy the Egyptian army. Israel sees and believes.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The verb kavad ('gain glory') in v4 is the same root as Pharaoh's hardened (kaved) heart — God's glory is displayed through the destruction of the one whose heart was heavy with stubbornness. The wordplay is devastating and intentional. Moses's command 'Stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD' (v13) introduces yeshu'ah into the narrative vocabulary — the same root that gives its name to Joshua and Jesus. The final verse states that Israel 'believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses' — the sea-crossing produces faith.*

Translation Friction: We rendered ve'ikkavdah bePar'oh as 'I will gain glory through Pharaoh,' preserving the kavad root connection rather than using a different English word. The geographic names Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon are retained untranslated since they function as proper nouns, though Baal-zephon ('Lord of the North') may carry polemical overtones. The phrase ruach qadim azzah ('a strong east wind,' v21) we rendered literally, noting that natural mechanism and divine miracle are not opposed in the Hebrew worldview.

Connections: The sea-crossing is the defining salvation event, referenced in Psalms 66:6; 106:9-12; 136:13-15; Isaiah 43:16-17; and 1 Corinthians 10:1-2. The dry ground (yabbashah) echoes creation's dry ground in Genesis 1:9. Pharaoh's chariots sinking into the sea reverses his military might, fulfilling the judgment announced in 14:4.

1Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2"Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon. You shall camp opposite it, by the sea. 3Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, 'They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.' 4I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and through all his army, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD." And they did so. 5When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the heart of Pharaoh and his servants turned against the people, and they said, "What have we done, that we let Israel go from serving us?" 6He made his chariot ready and took his army with him. 7He took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. 8The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out defiantly. 9The Egyptians pursued them — all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, his horsemen and his army — and overtook them encamped by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. 10As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel lifted up their eyes, and there were the Egyptians marching after them. They were terrified, and the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. 11They said to Moses, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us out to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12Is this not the very thing we said to you in Egypt: 'Leave us alone and let us serve the Egyptians'? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness." 13Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. 14The LORD will fight for you, and you need only be still." 15The LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to move forward. 16Lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, so that the sons of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground. 17And I — I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. 18The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen." 19Then the angel of God who was going before the camp of Israel moved and went behind them. The pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, 20coming between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. It was cloud and darkness to the one, yet it gave light by night to the other. Neither came near the other all night. 21Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea into dry ground. The waters were divided. 22The sons of Israel went through the sea on dry ground, with the waters as a wall to their right and to their left. 23The Egyptians gave chase and followed them into the middle of the sea — every one of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and cavalry. 24In the morning watch the LORD looked down on the Egyptian army through the pillar of fire and cloud and threw the Egyptian army into confusion. 25He clogged their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt!" 26Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen." 27Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. The Egyptians fled into it, and the LORD swept the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen — all the army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea. Not one of them remained. 29But the sons of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, with the waters as a wall to their right and to their left. 30In this way the LORD rescued Israel that day from Egyptian power, and the Israelites saw Egyptian soldiers lying dead along the shore. 31Israel saw the great power that the

LORD used against the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. God instructs an apparent tactical blunder — turning back toward a position that appears trapped. The strategy is deliberately designed to lure Pharaoh into pursuit.
2. The geography pins Israel between the wilderness and the sea — Pi-hahiroth, Migdol, and Baal-zephon form a geographical trap. God positions His people in apparent vulnerability as the setup for the decisive demonstration of power.
3. God predicts Pharaoh's interpretation: 'They are wandering aimlessly' (nevukhim hem ba'arets). The word navakh means 'to be confused, to wander without direction.' Pharaoh reads the retreat as disorientation — exactly what God intends him to think.
4. 'I will gain glory through Pharaoh' (ve'ikkavdah bePar'oh) — the verb kavah ('to be heavy, to gain glory') is the same root as the hardening verb (kaved). God's kavod ('glory/weight') will be displayed through the destruction of the one whose heart was kaved ('heavy/hard'). The wordplay is devastating: Pharaoh's heaviness of heart leads to God's heaviness of glory.
5. 'What have we done?' (mah-zot asinu) — the Egyptians' regret is not moral (we should not have oppressed them) but economic (we have lost our workforce). They see Israel not as people but as labor — even the exodus is filtered through the oppressor's categories.
6. Pharaoh mobilizes personally: 'he made his chariot ready' (vayyesor et-rikhbo). The king who sent others now leads the pursuit himself. Pride drives him toward the very judgment he was warned about.
7. Six hundred chosen chariots plus 'all the other chariots' — Egypt's full military capability is committed. The force is overwhelming by any human calculation. Iron Age chariotry was the ancient world's most devastating weapon system.
8. 'Going out defiantly' (beyad ramah) — literally 'with a high hand.' Israel leaves Egypt not cowering but with raised hands — a posture of confidence and triumph. The phrase will later describe deliberate sin (Numbers 15:30), but here it describes legitimate assertion of freedom.
9. The Egyptian army overtakes Israel at the sea — the geographical trap is sprung. Humanly speaking, the situation is hopeless: the sea ahead, the army behind, the wilderness on either side.
10. Israel's terror is visceral and immediate. Their cry to the LORD (vayyits'aqu el-YHWH) uses the same covenant-distress verb from 2:23. Under threat, they instinctively turn to the God who heard them before.
11. The bitter sarcasm of the complaint — 'Is it because there are no graves in Egypt?' — is the first of many wilderness murmurings. The irony is sharp: Egypt, the land of elaborate tombs and mummification, certainly had no shortage of graves.
12. 'Let us serve the Egyptians' (na'avdah et-Mitsrayim) — the verb avad ('serve') is the same word used for both slavery and worship. Israel's complaint reveals the psychological depth of bondage: some part of them still prefers the familiar oppression to the terrifying unknown of freedom.
13. 'See the salvation of the LORD' (re'u et-yeshu'at YHWH) — the first use of yeshu'ah ('salvation') in Exodus. The word derives from the root y-sh-' meaning 'to save, to deliver, to make spacious.' Salvation in Hebrew is not abstract but experiential: God creates space where there was constriction, freedom where there was bondage.
14. 'The LORD will fight for you, and you need only be still' (YHWH yillem lakhem ve'attem tacharishun) — one of the most compressed theological statements in the Torah. God fights; Israel rests. The verb charash ('be still, be silent') means to cease striving. The battle belongs to God, not to human effort.
15. 'Why do you cry out to Me? Tell them to move forward' (mah-tits'aq elai dabber el-benei Yisra'el veyissa'u) — God's response to prayer is not more prayer but action. There is a time to cry out and a time to march. Moses has prayed; now he must lead.
16. 'Divide it' (uveqa'ehu) — the verb baqa means 'to split, to cleave, to divide.' The same verb describes God splitting rocks for water (Psalm 78:15) and will describe the earth opening to swallow Korah (Numbers 16:31). God divides what no human power can divide.
17. God orchestrates the Egyptian pursuit into the divided sea — the hardening serves not only to sustain Pharaoh's rebellion but to draw him into the place of judgment. The sea becomes a courtroom.
18. 'The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD' — the knowledge formula appears for the final time in the plague-exodus narrative. Egypt's education concludes at the bottom of the sea.
19. The angel of God and the pillar of cloud shift from leading position to rearguard — moving from in front of Israel to behind them, placing themselves between Israel and Egypt. The protector repositions to shield the vulnerable side.
20. The pillar is simultaneously darkness to Egypt and light to Israel — the same divine presence that illuminates the covenant people blinds the oppressor. God's presence is not uniform; it is experienced differently depending on one's relationship to Him.
21. 'The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night' (vayyolekh YHWH et-hayyam beruach qadim azzah kol-hallailah) — the mechanism is both natural (wind) and supernatural (divine command). The east wind (ruach qadim) is the same wind that brought the locusts (10:13). God uses the elements as instruments, but the directing will is His.

22. 'Waters as a wall to their right and to their left' (vehamayim lahem chomah miyeminam umissemolam) — the word chomah ('wall') describes a solid, structural barrier. The water does not merely part; it stands upright like masonry. Israel walks through an architectural corridor of suspended water.
23. The Egyptians follow into the divided sea — a decision that requires either supreme confidence or supreme blindness. They enter the space God opened for Israel, not recognizing that what saves Israel will judge Egypt.
24. 'The morning watch' (be'ashmoret haboqer) — the last watch of the night, approximately 2-6 AM. God looks down (vayyashqef) through the pillar — the verb suggests peering down from above, a divine surveillance that precedes judgment. The same verb describes God looking down on Sodom (Genesis 19:28).
25. 'The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt' (YHWH nilcham lahem beMitsrayim) — the Egyptians reach the theological conclusion that Israel's terror prevented them from seeing: the LORD fights. The oppressor confesses what the oppressed could not yet believe.
26. The command to close the sea mirrors the command to open it (v16). Moses stretches out his hand in both directions — the human agent acts; the divine power responds.
27. 'The sea returned to its normal course' (vayyashav hayyam lifnot boqer le'etano) — the word etan means 'permanent, enduring, its usual force.' The miracle is temporary; the sea returns to what it permanently is. God's intervention creates a window within normal reality, not a permanent alteration of it.
28. 'Not one of them remained' (lo nish'ar bahem ad-echad) — total destruction. The army that pursued Israel with six hundred chariots is annihilated. The completeness of the judgment matches the completeness of God's promise to deliver.
29. Verse 29 restates the miracle from Israel's perspective — a deliberate literary framing. Verses 22 and 29 bracket the Egyptian destruction with Israel's safe passage. The same event is simultaneously salvation and judgment, depending on which side you stand.
30. 'The LORD saved Israel that day' (vayyosha YHWH bayyom hahu et-Yisra'el) — the verb yasha ('save') gives its name to yeshu'ah (salvation) and to Yeshua/Joshua/Jesus. The root meaning is to make spacious, to deliver from constriction. The dead Egyptians on the shore are the visible proof of completed deliverance.
31. 'The people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses' (vayyir'u ha'am et-YHWH vayya'aminu baYHWH uveMosheh avdo) — the narrative climax. Fear, faith, and recognition converge. The word he'eminu ('believed') is from the same root as emunah ('faithfulness') and amen. Israel's faith at the sea is active trust grounded in witnessed power — not blind belief but covenantal response to demonstrated salvation.

15

Summary: *Moses and Israel sing the Song of the Sea celebrating God's victory. Miriam leads the women in response. At Marah, God makes bitter water sweet. The chapter closes with the promise 'I am the LORD who heals you' at Elim's twelve springs.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Song of the Sea (Shirat HaYam) is one of the oldest and longest sustained poems in the Hebrew Bible, with archaic grammatical forms suggesting very early composition. The opening ga'oh ga'ah ('rising, He has risen') uses the infinitive absolute for absolute supremacy. The divine warrior title 'YHWH is a warrior' (YHWH ish milchamah, v3) is stated with maximum compression. The word yeshu'ah, introduced narratively in 14:13, now enters Israel's liturgy (v2) — theology becomes song.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase azzi vezimrat Yah ('my strength and my song,' v2) contains a debated word — zimrat may derive from zamar ('to sing') or from a root meaning 'protection.' We rendered it 'my song,' following the dominant tradition. The similes of the enemy sinking — like a stone (v5), like lead (v10) — convey irreversible submersion, and we preserved both images rather than consolidating. Miriam's title hanevi'ah ('the prophetess,' v20) we retained without elaboration, as the Hebrew grants her the title without further explanation.*

Connections: *The Song is echoed in Judges 5 (Song of Deborah), Psalm 18, and Habakkuk 3. The sanctuary destination (v17) anticipates both Sinai and the tabernacle. The healing at Marah (v25-26) introduces the divine title YHWH Rof'ekha ('the LORD your healer'), which recurs in Psalm 103:3. The twelve springs at Elim (v27) correspond to the twelve tribes.*

¹Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD. They said:

"I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.

²The LORD is my strength and my song,
and He has become my salvation.
This is my God, and I will praise Him,
my father's God, and I will exalt Him.

³The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is His name.

⁴Pharaoh's chariots and his army He cast into the sea,
and his chosen officers sank in the Sea of Reeds.

⁵The deep waters covered them;
they went down into the depths like a stone.

⁶Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power.
Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

⁷In the greatness of Your majesty You overthrow those who rise against You.
You send out Your fury; it consumes them like stubble.

⁸At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up;
the floods stood upright like a heap;
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.

⁹The enemy boasted, 'I will chase them down, I will catch them,
I will divide the plunder; my appetite will be gorged on them.
I will unsheathe my sword — my own hand will destroy them.'

¹⁰You blew with Your wind; the sea covered them.
They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

¹¹Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?
Who is like You — majestic in holiness,
awesome in splendor, working wonders?

¹²You stretched out Your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

¹³In Your faithful love You have led the people whom You have redeemed.
In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy dwelling.

¹⁴The peoples have heard; they tremble.
Anguish has seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

¹⁵Now the chiefs of Edom are dismayed;
trembling seizes the leaders of Moab;
all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

¹⁶Terror and dread fall upon them.
Because of the greatness of Your arm they are still as a stone,
until Your people pass over, O LORD,
until the people whom You have purchased pass over.

¹⁷You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance,
the place, O LORD, You have made for Your dwelling,
the sanctuary, O Lord, that Your hands have established.

¹⁸The LORD will reign forever and ever." ¹⁹For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry ground through the midst of the sea. ²⁰Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.

²¹Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea."

²²Then Moses led Israel onward from the Sea of Reeds, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur. They traveled three days in the wilderness and found no water. ²³When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. Therefore it was named Marah. ²⁴The people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" ²⁵He cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet. There the LORD made for them a statute and a rule, and there He tested them. ²⁶He said, "If you will diligently listen to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His eyes, and give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you that I put on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, your healer." ²⁷Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there by the water.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Song of the Sea (Shirat HaYam) is the longest sustained poem in the Pentateuch and one of the oldest pieces of Hebrew poetry in the Bible. Its archaic grammatical forms and vocabulary suggest very early composition. The opening verb *ashirah* ('I will sing') is cohortative — an expression of determined will, not mere description. 'He has triumphed gloriously' (*ga'oh ga'ah*) is an infinitive absolute construction: 'rising, He has risen' or 'exalting, He has exalted Himself.' The doubling conveys absolute supremacy.
2. 'My strength and my song' (*azzi vezimrat*) — the word *zimrat* may derive from *zamar* ('to sing, to prune, to trim'). The pairing of strength and song defines God's character in the exodus: power expressed through praise. 'He has become my salvation' (*vayehi-li lishu'ah*) — the word *yeshu'ah* from the sea-crossing narrative (14:13) is now incorporated into worship. Theology enters liturgy.
3. 'The LORD is a warrior' (YHWH *ish milchamah*) — literally 'YHWH is a man of war.' This is the divine warrior title, stated with maximum compression. 'The LORD is His name' (YHWH *shemo*) — identity is declared, not defended. The name carries its own authority.
4. The song names the specific agents of judgment: chariots, army, chosen officers. The verb *yara* ('cast, hurled') depicts forceful, violent action — God throws Egypt's military power into the sea like discarded objects.
5. 'They went down into the depths like a stone' (*yardu bimtsolot kemo-aven*) — the simile of a stone sinking captures the finality of the judgment. The same image recurs in v10 (lead) and the two similes together (stone, lead) convey weight, sinking, irreversible submersion.
6. 'Your right hand, O LORD' (*yeminkha YHWH*) — the right hand is the hand of power, strength, and action. The parallelism is characteristic of Hebrew poetry: the first line states the right hand's majesty; the second line states its destructive effect on the enemy. The repetition of 'Your right hand, O LORD' creates an anaphoric pattern that drives the poem forward.
7. 'Consumes them like stubble' (*yokhlemo kaqash*) — fire imagery applied to God's fury (*charon*). The enemies of God burn like dry stalks — insubstantial before divine wrath. The image contrasts the burning bush (3:2), which was not consumed, with the enemies of God, who are.
8. 'At the blast of Your nostrils' (*uveruach appekha*) — the wind (*ruach*) that divided the sea is described anthropomorphically as the breath of God's nostrils. The same *ruach* that hovered over creation's waters (Genesis 1:2) now piles up the sea's waters. 'Congealed' (*qafe'u*) — the deep waters solidified, stood firm like walls. The verb is rare and vivid.

9. The enemy's boast is rendered in first-person: five verbs of intended violence (pursue, overtake, divide, draw, destroy). The cumulative effect captures the predator's confidence — a confidence the sea will swallow whole. The enemy never speaks again after this verse.
10. 'You blew with Your wind' (nashafta beruchakha) — God's breath is sufficient to undo the enemy's boast. One divine exhalation answers five human verbs of violence. 'They sank like lead' (tsalelu ka'oferet) — the second sinking simile (cf. v5, stone). Lead is denser than stone; the imagery intensifies.
11. 'Who is like You among the gods, O LORD?' (mi-khamokha ba'elim YHWH) — the rhetorical question is the theological climax of the song. The answer is obvious and overwhelming: no one. 'Majestic in holiness' (ne'dar baqqodesh) — the word ne'dar means 'majestic, glorious, awe-inspiring.' Holiness (qodesh) is the attribute that defines God's incomparability. This verse will become one of the most quoted liturgical lines in Jewish worship.
12. 'The earth swallowed them' (tivla'emo erets) — the verb bala ('swallow') is the same verb used when Aaron's staff swallowed the Egyptian staffs (7:12). The pattern of consumption runs through the narrative: what God's instruments swallow cannot be recovered.
13. 'In Your steadfast love You have led' (nachita vechasdekha) — chesed appears in the Song of the Sea for the first time. God's covenant love is not merely emotional but directional — it leads. 'Your holy dwelling' (neveh qodshekha) — the poem looks forward from the sea to the destination: God's holy dwelling, whether understood as Sinai, the promised land, or the future temple.
14. The song's horizon expands from the sea to the surrounding nations. The peoples (ammim) hear and tremble — the exodus radiates fear outward. Philistia, the nearest enemy, is seized with anguish (chil).
15. Edom, Moab, and Canaan — the three peoples Israel will encounter on the journey — are paralyzed by what God has done at the sea. The verbs intensify: 'dismayed' (nivhalu), 'trembling seizures' (achazemo ra'ad), 'melted away' (namogu). Fear progresses from alarm to paralysis to dissolution.
16. 'Until Your people pass over' (ad-ya'avor ammekha) — the verb avar ('pass over, cross') echoes the Passover (pesach) and the crossing of the sea. Israel is the people who pass through — through judgment, through water, through wilderness. 'The people whom You have purchased' (am-zu qanita) — the verb qanah means to acquire, purchase, create. God bought Israel at the cost of Egypt's judgment.
17. 'You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of Your inheritance' (tevi'emo vetita'emo behar nachalatekha) — the verbs 'bring in' and 'plant' shift from the sea to the land. The exodus is not complete at the shore; it is complete when Israel is planted — rooted like a tree — in the place God has prepared. 'The sanctuary that Your hands have established' (miqqedash Adonai konenu yadekha) — the song concludes with the temple vision: God's own hands build the final dwelling.
18. 'The LORD will reign forever and ever' (YHWH yimlokh le'olam va'ed) — the song's final declaration is a statement of eternal sovereignty. After the narrative of plagues, the night of Passover, and the destruction at the sea, the conclusion is cosmic: YHWH reigns. The word olam stretches God's kingship beyond the horizon of time.
19. The narrator returns to prose, summarizing the sea event one final time. The repetition serves as a transition from song back to narrative.
20. 'Miriam the prophetess' (Miriam hanevi'ah) — the first woman in the Bible explicitly called a prophetess (nevi'ah). Her title is not honorary; it declares a recognized role. She leads the women's response with tambourine (tof) and dance (mecholot). Worship at the sea is gendered but shared — Moses leads one song, Miriam leads another.
21. Miriam's song reprises the opening verse of the Song of the Sea — the same words, now in the mouth of a woman leading the women. The repetition is not redundancy but antiphonal worship: one community, two voices, the same praise.
22. The transition from the sea to the wilderness is abrupt. Three days without water immediately follows the greatest miracle in Israel's history. The pattern of exodus life begins here: miracle, then testing; deliverance, then difficulty.
23. 'Marah' (marah) means 'bitter.' The naming of places by experience is characteristic of wilderness narrative — geography becomes theology. The people cannot drink the water that bears the name of their condition.
24. The first wilderness complaint follows immediately after the Song of the Sea. The distance between praise (v1) and grumbling (v24) measures the fragility of faith under pressure.
25. God provides a remedy: a piece of wood (ets) makes bitter water sweet. The same God who divided the sea now transforms a spring. The scale is different; the provider is the same. 'There He tested them' (sham nisahu) — the verb nasah ('to test') from Genesis 22:1 (the Aqedah) reappears. The wilderness is a testing ground.
26. The conditional promise — 'If you listen... I will put none of the diseases' — introduces the covenant-obedience framework that will dominate Exodus through Deuteronomy. 'I am the LORD, your healer' (ani YHWH rof'ekha) — a divine self-designation. The God who judges Egypt also heals Israel. The same power works in both directions.
27. Elim — twelve springs and seventy palms — provides rest and abundance. Twelve springs for twelve tribes; seventy palms echoing the seventy persons who entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27). The numbers are not accidental; they are provision fitted to identity.

16

Summary: *One month after the exodus, Israel grumbles about hunger in the wilderness of Sin. God provides quail in the evening and manna each morning, with a double portion on the sixth day for the Sabbath. Some disobey the gathering rules; the manna is preserved in a jar as a testimony.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The manna tests whether Israel will walk in God's torah ('instruction,' v4) before the Torah is formally given at Sinai — obedience precedes legislation. The Sabbath rhythm of six-and-one is built into the provision before it appears in the Decalogue. The people's complaint idealizes Egyptian slavery ('when we sat by the meat pots,' v3), revealing that freedom is uncomfortable and memory is selective. God responds to complaint not with rebuke but with bread from heaven.*

Translation Friction: *The word man hu ('what is it?' v15) — from which 'manna' may derive — is debated. We retained 'What is it?' as a question, which is how the Hebrew functions, though some scholars read man as an Egyptian loanword for a natural resin. The term torah in v4 ('My instruction') appears before Sinai; we chose 'instruction' rather than 'law' to capture its pre-legal sense of divine teaching. The wilderness of Sin (v1) is unrelated to the English word 'sin' and we left it untranslated as a proper noun.*

Connections: *The manna is cited by Moses in Deuteronomy 8:3 ('man does not live by bread alone') and by Jesus in John 6:31-35. The Sabbath provision anticipates the fourth commandment (20:8-11). The jar of manna placed before the Testimony (v33-34) connects to the ark contents in Hebrews 9:4. The grumbling pattern (15:24, 16:2, 17:2) becomes structural in Numbers.*

1They set out from Elim, and the whole congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3The sons of Israel said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots, when we ate bread to satisfaction! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion each day, so that I may test them — whether they will walk according to My instruction or not. 5On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." 6So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, "At evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because He has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" 8Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfaction in the morning — because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against Him — what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD." 9Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, 'Draw near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumbling.'" 10As Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. 11The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12"I have heard the grumbling of the sons of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine, flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" — for they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. 16This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer per person, according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.'" 17The sons of Israel did so. Some gathered more, some less. 18But when they measured it with an omer, the one who gathered much had nothing left over, and the one who gathered little had no lack. Each gathered according to what he could eat. 19Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it until morning." 20But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. 21They gathered it morning by morning, each according to what he could eat, and when the sun grew hot, it melted. 22On the sixth

day they gathered twice as much bread — two omers per person. All the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses. ²³ He said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and set aside all that is left over to keep until morning.'" ²⁴ They set it aside until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. ²⁵ Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD. Today you will not find it in the field. ²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none." ²⁷ On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ The LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? ²⁹ See, the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Each of you stay where you are; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day." ³⁰ On the seventh day, the people refrained from work and rested. ³¹ The house of Israel called its name manna. It was like white coriander seed, and its taste was like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Fill an omer of it to be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" ³³ Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations." ³⁴ Following the LORD's command to Moses, Aaron placed it in front of the Testimony for safekeeping. ³⁵ The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land. They ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. ³⁶ An omer is a tenth of an ephah.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The wilderness of Sin (not related to the English word 'sin') is located between Elim and Sinai. The precise date — fifteenth day of the second month — places this exactly one month after the exodus. Israel has been free for thirty days and is now hungry.
2. The second wilderness murmuring (cf. 15:24). The pattern of deliverance-then-complaint is becoming structural: God provides, Israel travels, difficulty arises, Israel complains, God provides again.
3. The complaint idealizes Egypt: 'meat pots' and 'bread to satisfaction.' Slavery is retroactively romanticized because freedom is currently uncomfortable. The accusation that Moses brought them out 'to kill this whole assembly with hunger' inverts the reality — God brought them out to give them life.
4. 'Rain bread from heaven' (mamtir lakhem lechem min-hashamayim) — God's response to complaint is not rebuke but provision. The bread from heaven will become a defining image of divine sustenance. The test (nasah) embedded in the provision is whether Israel will obey the gathering rules — daily trust, no hoarding.
5. The double portion on the sixth day anticipates the Sabbath before Sinai formally legislates it. The rhythm of six-and-one is built into the manna before it is built into the law.
6. 'You will know that it was the LORD who brought you out' — the knowledge formula returns, now directed at Israel rather than Egypt. Israel too must learn who YHWH is, and they learn through provision, not only through judgment.
7. 'The glory of the LORD' (kevod YHWH) — the first appearance of kavod in a theophany context in Exodus. God's weighty, visible presence appears in the cloud in response to Israel's grumbling. Kavod manifests not in the spectacular (as at Sinai) but in the everyday (feeding a hungry people).
8. Moses redirects the complaint: 'Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.' The people think they are arguing with human leaders; Moses reveals they are arguing with God. The prophetic role includes this uncomfortable truth-telling.
9. 'Draw near before the LORD' (qirvu lifnei YHWH) — the verb qarav ('draw near') will become the technical term for offering sacrifices (the root of qorban, 'offering'). Here it means approaching God's presence, which is about to become visible.
10. 'The glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud' (kevod YHWH nir'ah be'anan) — kavod becomes visible. The cloud that has been guiding them (13:21-22) now reveals the divine presence within it. The people see what they have been following.
11. A new divine speech introduces the specific provision: meat in the evening, bread in the morning.
12. 'Then you will know that I am the LORD your God' — provision is revelation. God feeds Israel not merely to sustain them but to teach them who He is. Every meal of manna is a theology lesson.
13. Quail (selav) arrive in the evening, covering the camp. These are migratory birds that cross the Sinai Peninsula and can be caught when exhausted. The natural mechanism does not diminish the divine timing.
14. The manna is described precisely: fine, flaky, frost-like. The physical description grounds the miracle in sensory reality — this is something you can see, touch, and taste.

15. 'What is it?' (man hu) — the name manna may derive from this question. Israel encounters something they have never seen before and name it by their bewilderment. The bread from heaven defies existing categories.
16. The omer-per-person rule establishes equality: each household receives according to need, not according to power or status. The distribution principle will be cited by Paul in 2 Corinthians 8:15.
17. Some gathered more, some less — human behavior varies even under divine instruction.
18. The miraculous equalization: regardless of how much each person gathered, the measure came out to exactly one omer per person. Surplus and deficit are both corrected by divine provision. This is not merely logistics but theology: God ensures sufficiency.
19. The prohibition against keeping until morning tests daily trust. Can Israel depend on God for tomorrow's bread, or must they hoard today's?
20. Disobedience produces rot: worms and stench. The manna that sustains when gathered in trust corrupts when hoarded in anxiety. The physical consequence teaches the spiritual lesson.
21. Daily gathering, daily dependence. The rhythm of morning collection and midday melting forces Israel into a pattern of reliance that cannot be circumvented by stockpiling.
22. The double portion on the sixth day arrives without special effort — God provides the Sabbath surplus automatically. The leaders report this anomaly to Moses, not yet understanding the pattern.
23. 'A holy Sabbath to the LORD' (shabbat qodesh laYHWH) — the Sabbath is introduced before Sinai, before the formal commandment. The manna teaches Sabbath-keeping through practice before Sinai teaches it through law. The word shabbaton ('solemn rest') intensifies shabbat.
24. Friday's manna does not rot — the exception proves the rule. What corrupted when hoarded on other nights is preserved when kept for Sabbath. God's provision conforms to God's calendar.
25. Moses declares the theological principle: the Sabbath belongs to the LORD. The day is not merely a human rest period but a divine institution. No manna will appear because God Himself rests from providing — the divine Sabbath models the human one.
26. Six days of gathering, one day of rest. The creation pattern (Genesis 1-2) is reproduced in the wilderness food cycle. Israel lives inside the rhythm God established at creation.
27. Some went out on the seventh day anyway and found nothing. Disobedience on the Sabbath is not punished with worms (as weekday hoarding was) but with absence. There is simply nothing there.
28. God's rebuke is directed through Moses: 'How long will you refuse to keep My commandments?' The plural 'you' (teme'anu) addresses the whole people, not just the Sabbath-breakers. Corporate responsibility is assumed.
29. 'The LORD has given you the Sabbath' (YHWH natan lakhem et-haShabbat) — the Sabbath is a gift, not merely a restriction. The double bread on the sixth day is the evidence: God provides in advance so that rest is possible. Sabbath is sustained by prior provision.
30. 'The people rested' (vayyishbetu ha'am) — the verb shavat appears for the first time in Exodus describing human rest. Israel does what God did at creation: ceases from labor on the seventh day.
31. The name 'manna' (man) is formally given. The physical description — white coriander seed, taste of honey wafers — makes the substance vivid and appealing. Numbers 11:7-8 will give additional details.
32. An omer of manna is preserved as a perpetual witness to divine provision in the wilderness. The jar will eventually be placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Hebrews 9:4), keeping the bread of the wilderness inside the holiest object in Israel.
33. Aaron is charged with the preservation — a priestly duty. The manna is placed 'before the LORD' (lifnei YHWH), meaning in God's presence, anticipating the tabernacle.
34. 'Before the Testimony' (lifnei ha'edut) — the Testimony refers to the tablets of the covenant that do not yet exist in the narrative. The narrator writes from the perspective of the completed tabernacle, placing the manna jar in its permanent home.
35. 'Forty years' — the manna sustained Israel for the entire wilderness period. The provision was not temporary but generational. It ceased only when Israel entered the promised land and ate its produce (Joshua 5:12).
36. A parenthetical measurement note: an omer equals one-tenth of an ephah (approximately 2.3 liters or 2 quarts). The narrator provides the conversion for readers unfamiliar with the measurement.

17

Summary: *At Rephidim, Israel quarrels over thirst; God provides water from the rock at Horeb. The Amalekites attack, and Israel prevails while Moses holds up the staff — when his arms tire, Aaron and Hur support them. God declares perpetual war against Amalek.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The place-names Massah and Meribah ('testing' and 'quarreling') memorialize Israel's failure in the geography itself. The staff that struck the Nile in judgment (7:20) now strikes the rock in provision — judgment-tools repurposed as grace-tools. The battle scene with Moses's raised hands (vv11-12) creates one of Scripture's most vivid images of intercession: when the hands are lifted, Israel prevails; when they drop, Amalek prevails. The altar name YHWH Nissi ('The LORD is my banner,' v15) becomes a divine title.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered vayyarev ('quarreled,' v2) to distinguish it from the grumbling (vayyillonu) of chapter 16 — the Hebrew escalates from complaint to legal dispute. The phrase massah umerivah ('testing and quarreling,' v7) we transliterated in the notes because these become fixed theological place-names referenced throughout Scripture. God standing 'on the rock at Horeb' (v6) places the divine presence at the point of provision — we rendered this literally to preserve the spatial theology.*

Connections: *The water from the rock is cited in Psalm 78:15-16; 105:41; and 1 Corinthians 10:4 (where Paul identifies the rock with Christ). The battle with Amalek is referenced in Deuteronomy 25:17-19 and 1 Samuel 15. Moses's supported arms anticipate the intercessory posture throughout Scripture (1 Timothy 2:8).*

¹The whole congregation of the sons of Israel set out from the wilderness of Sin, traveling by stages as the LORD commanded, and they camped at Rephidim. But there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³ But the people thirsted for water there, and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt — to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the sons of Israel and because they tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" ⁸Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. ⁹Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us and go out to fight Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand." ¹⁰So Joshua did as Moses told him and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. ¹¹Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. ¹²But Moses's hands grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on each side, so that his hands remained steady until the sun went down. ¹³Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. ¹⁴The LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." ¹⁵Moses built an altar and called its name "The LORD Is My Banner," ¹⁶saying, "A hand is on the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. No water at Rephidim — the third provision crisis (bitter water at Marah, 15:23; hunger in Sin, 16:3; now thirst at Rephidim). Each crisis tests whether Israel will trust the God who has already provided.
2. The people 'quarrel' (vayyarev) and 'test' (tenassun) the LORD. Both verbs will be memorialized in the place-names Meribah ('quarreling') and Massah ('testing'). Moses reframes the complaint: they are not arguing with him but testing God.

3. The accusation repeats the Egypt-death formula from 16:3: 'You brought us out to kill us.' The complaint grows more specific — now livestock and children are named. Fear sharpens the rhetoric.
4. 'A little more and they will stone me' (od me'at usqaluni) — Moses's fear is physical, not hypothetical. The mob anger is so intense that Moses believes death is imminent. His appeal to God is raw: 'What shall I do?'
5. God's instruction uses the same staff that struck the Nile (7:20) — the instrument of Egypt's first plague becomes the instrument of Israel's provision. Judgment-tools are repurposed as grace-tools.
6. 'I will stand before you there on the rock' (hineni omed lefanekha sham al-hatsur) — God positions Himself on the rock before Moses strikes it. The divine presence is at the point of impact. When Moses strikes the rock, he strikes the place where God stands. The water comes from God's presence, not merely from stone.
7. Massah ('testing') and Meribah ('quarreling') — the place-names memorialize Israel's worst moment: questioning whether God is present. 'Is the LORD among us or not?' (hayesh YHWH beqirbenu im-ayin) is the existential question of the wilderness. It will be answered definitively at Sinai and in the tabernacle.
8. Amalek attacks the vulnerable — Deuteronomy 25:17-18 specifies that they struck the stragglers at the rear. This is Israel's first military engagement as a free people.
9. Joshua (Yehoshua, 'the LORD saves') appears for the first time by name. He is assigned military command while Moses takes the intercessory position on the hill. The battle is fought on two fronts: sword below, prayer above.
10. Aaron and Hur accompany Moses — the prophetic, priestly, and civic leadership together on the hilltop. Hur's identity is not specified here; tradition identifies him as Miriam's son (possibly from the tribe of Judah).
11. 'Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed' — the raised hands are not magical but intercessory. Moses's posture embodies Israel's dependence on God: when the mediator lifts his hands, God's power flows through the battle. When the hands drop, the power ebbs.
12. 'Moses's hands grew heavy' (uydei Mosheh kevedim) — the adjective kaved ('heavy') echoes Pharaoh's heavy heart and Moses's heavy mouth. The same root that described obstacles throughout Exodus now describes the prophet's physical limitation. Aaron and Hur become the support structure — one man cannot sustain intercession alone. The word emunah ('steady, faithful') describes Moses's supported hands, linking physical steadiness to covenantal faithfulness.
13. Joshua 'overwhelmed' (vayyachalosh) Amalek — the verb chalash means to weaken, disable, defeat. The victory is attributed to Joshua's sword and Moses's hands working together.
14. 'Write this as a memorial in a book' (ketov zot zikkaron bassefer) — the first divine command to write in the Bible. The memory of Amalek's attack — and God's promise to blot out Amalek — is to be preserved in written form. Written memory outlasts oral tradition.
15. 'The LORD Is My Banner' (YHWH Nissi) — the altar name declares God as Israel's military standard. A nes ('banner, standard') was a rallying point in battle — the flag around which soldiers gathered. God is the point around which Israel's warfare organizes.
16. 'From generation to generation' (midor dor) — the conflict with Amalek is not a one-time event but an ongoing reality. The LORD's war against Amalek extends across all generations until Amalek is blotted out.

18

Summary: Jethro, the Midianite priest and Moses's father-in-law, hears what God has done, brings Zipporah and Moses's sons to the wilderness, blesses the LORD, and offers sacrifices. He then advises Moses to delegate judicial authority to qualified leaders at multiple levels.

What Makes This Remarkable: A non-Israelite priest acknowledges YHWH's supremacy — 'Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods' (v11). Jethro's confession forms a counterpoint to Pharaoh's rejection. His administrative counsel (vv17-23) introduces the principle that wise governance is not opposed to divine calling — practical wisdom from an outsider restructures Israel's leadership. Moses's two sons' names together summarize his biography: Gershom ('sojourner there') encodes alienation, Eliezer ('my God is help') encodes rescue.

Translation Friction: We rendered Jethro's title kohen Midyan as 'priest of Midian' without specifying which deity he served, since the text does not clarify and his conversion scene in v11 suggests a genuine theological turn. The verb shillach describing Moses sending Zipporah back (v2) is the same verb used for Pharaoh releasing Israel — we noted this wordplay. Jethro's qualifications for judges — 'capable men who fear God, trustworthy, who hate dishonest gain' (v21) — we rendered with accessible English rather than technical legal vocabulary.

Connections: Jethro's administrative structure reappears in Deuteronomy 1:9-18. His confession echoes Rahab's in Joshua 2:9-11. The judicial delegation principle shapes Israel's governance through the period of the judges. The shared meal between Jethro and Israel's elders (v12) anticipates the covenant meal of 24:11.

¹Jethro, the priest of Midian and Moses's father-in-law, learned about everything God had done for Moses and for Israel His people — how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. ²Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, had taken Zipporah, Moses's wife, after Moses had sent her back, ³along with her two sons, one of whom was named Gershom — for Moses had said, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land" — ⁴and the other was named Eliezer — "for the God of my father was my help and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh." ⁵Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, came with Moses's sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness where he was camped, at the mountain of God. ⁶He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons." ⁷Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They asked each other about their welfare and went into the tent. ⁸Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had befallen them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. ⁹Jethro rejoiced over all the good that the LORD had done for Israel, in that He had delivered them from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this matter where they dealt arrogantly, He was above them." ¹²Then Jethro, Moses's father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron and all the elders of Israel came to eat bread with Moses's father-in-law before God. ¹³The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning until evening. ¹⁴When Moses's father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" ¹⁵Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶When they have a dispute, they come to me, and I judge between one person and another, and I make known the statutes of God and His instructions." ¹⁷Moses's father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸You will surely wear out, both you and this people who are with you, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone. ¹⁹Now listen to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You shall represent the people before God and bring their cases to God. ²⁰You shall teach them the statutes and the instructions and make known to them the way in which they must walk and the work that they must do. ²¹Moreover, look for able men from all the people — men who fear God, who are trustworthy and who hate dishonest gain — and appoint them as leaders over thousands, over hundreds, over fifties, and over tens. ²²Let them judge the people at all times. Every major matter they shall bring to you, but every minor matter they shall decide themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. ²³If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace." ²⁴Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people — leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. ²⁶They judged the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but every minor matter they decided themselves. ²⁷Then Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went away to his own land.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Jethro's visit bridges the exodus and Sinai narratives. A Midianite priest — a non-Israelite — hears what God has done and comes to acknowledge YHWH. The outsider's response to the exodus forms a counterpoint to Pharaoh's rejection.
2. Moses had 'sent back' (shilluchehah) Zipporah at some point — the details are not given. The verb shillach is the same used for Pharaoh releasing Israel. The personal cost of the mission is noted but not elaborated.
3. Gershom's name ('sojourner there') encodes Moses's exile identity. Even the deliverer was once a displaced person.
4. Eliezer ('my God is help') encodes deliverance — named for God's protection of Moses from Pharaoh. The two sons' names together summarize Moses's biography: alienation (Gershom) and rescue (Eliezer).
5. 'The mountain of God' (har ha'Elohim) — Horeb/Sinai. Jethro comes to the same mountain where Moses saw the burning bush. The geography of revelation recurs.

6. The formal announcement of arrival follows ancient Near Eastern protocol — a visiting dignitary sends word before appearing.
7. Moses's greeting — going out, bowing, kissing — shows deep respect for his father-in-law. The verb *hishtachavah* ('bowed down') is the same word used for worship. Familial reverence mirrors the posture of divine reverence.
8. Moses recounts the entire exodus narrative to Jethro — the plagues, the hardships, the deliverance. This is the first retelling of the exodus to an outsider, and it is given to a Midianite priest. The story is not kept within Israel.
9. Jethro's joy (*vayyichad*) is the response the exodus was designed to produce: recognition of YHWH's power and goodness. What Pharaoh refused, Jethro embraces.
10. 'Blessed be the LORD' (*barukh YHWH*) — a Midianite priest blesses the God of Israel. The ecumenical reach of the exodus is visible here: YHWH's acts produce worship from outside the covenant community.
11. 'Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods' (*attah yadati ki-gadol YHWH mikkol-ha'elohim*) — the knowledge formula, previously applied to Pharaoh and Egypt, is now fulfilled by Jethro. A pagan priest reaches the conclusion that ten plagues were designed to teach: YHWH is supreme. The phrase 'where they dealt arrogantly' (*badavar asher zadu*) refers to Egypt's arrogance — God's judgment precisely matched their sin.
12. Jethro offers sacrifices to God — a non-Israelite performing worship at the mountain of God, eating bread with Aaron and the elders 'before God' (*lifnei ha'Elohim*). This meal anticipates the covenant meal of chapter 24 but includes a Midianite. The boundaries of worship are remarkably permeable at this stage.
13. Moses as sole judge — sitting from morning to evening hearing disputes. The description of exhausting one-man governance sets up Jethro's intervention.
14. Jethro identifies the problem with the directness of a seasoned leader: 'What you are doing is not good.' The same phrase (*lo-tov*) echoes Genesis 2:18 ('It is not good for the man to be alone'). Solitary leadership, like solitary existence, is structurally inadequate.
15. Moses explains his role: mediator between the people and God. The people come 'to inquire of God' (*lidrosh Elohim*) — the verb *darash* means 'to seek, to inquire, to consult.' Moses functions as the access point between Israel and divine instruction.
16. Moses serves three functions: arbitrator of disputes, communicator of divine statutes (*chuqqim*), and teacher of divine instruction (*torot*, plural of *torah*). The triple role is unsustainable for one person.
17. 'Not good' (*lo-tov haddavar*) — Jethro's practical wisdom identifies organizational failure. The Midianite priest contributes to Israel's governance structure. Wisdom is not limited to the covenant community.
18. 'Too heavy for you' (*kaved mimmekha haddavar*) — the word *kaved* ('heavy') echoes throughout Exodus. Moses's burden is 'heavy' as Pharaoh's heart was 'heavy' and Moses's hands were 'heavy.' The solution is delegation, not endurance.
19. Jethro's counsel begins: Moses should focus on two things — representing the people before God and bringing their cases to God. Everything else can be delegated.
20. Teaching is Moses's primary role: statutes (*chuqqot*), instructions (*torot*), 'the way they must walk' (*haderekh yelkhu vah*), and 'the work they must do' (*hamma'aseh asher ya'asun*). Four categories of instruction that anticipate the Sinai legislation.
21. The leadership qualifications are character-based: able (*chayil* — capable, competent), God-fearing (*yir'ei Elohim*), trustworthy (*anshei emet* — men of truth), and incorruptible (*son'ei vatsa* — hating dishonest gain). Competence without character is excluded.
22. The tiered system — thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens — distributes both authority and burden. Major matters escalate to Moses; minor matters are resolved locally. The principle is subsidiarity: decisions made at the lowest effective level.
23. 'Go to their place in peace' (*al-meqomo yavo veshalom*) — Jethro's counsel aims at *shalom* for the entire community. The word *shalom* here means not merely absence of conflict but well-functioning communal order.
24. 'Moses listened' (*vayyishma Mosheh*) — the deliverer who spoke for God to Pharaoh now listens to a Midianite's practical advice. Humility is accepting wisdom from unexpected sources.
25. Implementation is immediate and complete. Moses selects, appoints, and structures — the organizational reform takes effect before Sinai.
26. The system works: difficult cases rise to Moses, routine matters are handled locally. The narrative confirms Jethro's wisdom through successful operation.
27. Jethro departs to his own land. The Midianite priest who blessed YHWH, offered sacrifices, and restructured Israel's governance returns home. His contribution is preserved in the Torah and implemented permanently.

19

Summary: *Israel arrives at Sinai in the third month. God declares them a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation,' the people consecrate themselves, and on the third day God descends on the mountain in fire, smoke, and thunder. Boundaries are set; only Moses may approach.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The singular verb vayyichan ('he camped') for the plural subject 'Israel' (v2) is grammatically striking — at Sinai, Israel becomes one entity. Rashi noted: 'like one man with one heart.' The eagle-wing image (v4) combines power with nurture: the nesher (griffon vulture) is the largest soaring bird in the region. The destination is not land but God Himself: 'I brought you to Myself.' The covenant offer in v5-6 — 'kingdom of priests, holy nation' (mamlakhet kohanim vegoy qadosh) — defines Israel's identity for all subsequent Scripture.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered mamlakhet kohanim as 'kingdom of priests' rather than 'priestly kingdom,' preserving the construct-chain order and the implication that every member of the nation has priestly access. The word segullah ('treasured possession,' v5) has no exact English equivalent — it denotes a king's personal treasure, distinct from general crown property. We used 'treasured possession' and expanded in notes. The theophany vocabulary (thunder, lightning, thick cloud, trumpet blast) required careful handling to avoid making it sound like mere weather.*

Connections: *The 'kingdom of priests' declaration is cited in 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 1:6; 5:10. The theophany imagery recurs at Elijah's Horeb experience (1 Kings 19:11-12), in Isaiah 6, and in Hebrews 12:18-21. The three-day preparation anticipates other three-day patterns: Jonah 1:17, Hosea 6:2, and the resurrection narratives.*

¹In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came to the wilderness of Sinai. ²They set out from Rephidim and came to the wilderness of Sinai, and they camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there before the mountain. ³Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine. ⁶You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." ⁷Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸The entire people responded in unison, "Everything the LORD has spoken, we will do." Then Moses brought the people's answer back to the LORD. ⁹The LORD said to Moses, "I am coming to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. ¹⁰The LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Let them wash their garments ¹¹and be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You shall set boundaries for the people all around, saying, 'Be careful not to go up on the mountain or touch its edge. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. ¹³No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot through. Whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up to the mountain." ¹⁴Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. ¹⁵He said to the people, "Be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman." ¹⁶On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. ¹⁹As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder. ²⁰The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. ²¹The LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look, and many of them perish. ²²Even the priests who come near to the LORD must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them." ²³Mo

ses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You Yourself warned us, saying, 'Set boundaries around the mountain and consecrate it.'" ²⁴The LORD said to him, "Go down, and then come up — you and Aaron with you. But the priests and the people must not break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break out against them." ²⁵So Moses went down to the people and told them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'The third month' (bachodesh hashelishi) — Israel arrives at Sinai exactly three months after the exodus. The third day (v11, 16) will bring the theophany. The number three structures the approach: third month, third day, threefold preparation.
2. 'Israel camped there before the mountain' (vayyichan-sham Yisra'el neged hahar) — the singular verb (vayyichan, 'he camped') is noteworthy: the plural 'sons of Israel' are treated grammatically as a unity. At Sinai, Israel becomes one entity facing one God. Rashi noted this: 'like one man with one heart.'
3. 'House of Jacob... sons of Israel' (beit Ya'aqov... benei Yisra'el) — the dual address may distinguish the whole community (house of Jacob) from the covenant heirs (sons of Israel), or it may be poetic parallelism. The traditional reading is that 'house of Jacob' includes the women and children.
4. 'Eagles' wings' (kanfei nesharim) — the image of God carrying Israel like an eagle carries its young is tender and powerful. The nesher is likely a griffon vulture, not a bald eagle — the largest soaring bird in the region. Deuteronomy 32:11 will elaborate the image. The destination is not merely the promised land but God Himself: 'I brought you to Myself' (va'avi etkhem elai).
5. 'My treasured possession' (segullah) — a word meaning personal property of special value, a royal treasure. Israel is not merely God's people but His prized possession. 'If you will obey My voice and keep My covenant' (im-shamo'a tishme'u beqoli ushmartem et-beriti) — the conditional clause makes the covenant relationship bilateral: God has already acted (the exodus); now Israel must respond with obedience. The covenant is offered, not imposed.
6. 'A kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (mamlekhet kohanim vegoy qadosh) — one of the most consequential declarations in the Bible. Israel's vocation is priestly: mediating between God and the nations. And they are qadosh — set apart for God's purposes. The entire nation, not just a clerical class, is called to holiness.
7. Moses mediates: God speaks to Moses, Moses speaks to the elders, the elders represent the people. The chain of communication is formal and structured.
8. 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (kol asher-dibber YHWH na'aseh) — Israel's collective acceptance of the covenant before hearing its terms. The verb na'aseh ('we will do') precedes the giving of the law. Commitment comes before content — a pattern that will be repeated and intensified in 24:7 ('we will do and we will hear').
9. 'A thick cloud' (av he'anan) — the cloud of divine presence (cf. 13:21) now intensifies. God comes in cloud to simultaneously reveal and conceal — Israel hears God's voice but does not see God's form. The cloud mediates between divine fullness and human limitation.
10. Consecration (qiddesh) involves ritual preparation — washing garments symbolizes inner purification. The people must be set apart before they can encounter the God who is set apart.
11. 'The LORD will come down' (yered YHWH) — the verb yarad ('descend') is the same word used for God's descent in 3:8 ('I have come down to deliver'). At the exodus, God descended to rescue; at Sinai, God descends to covenant. Both are acts of divine condescension — God bridging the gap between heaven and earth.
12. Boundaries (gevu) around the mountain create sacred space. The mountain is not inherently holy; it becomes holy because God's presence makes it so. The death penalty for trespass is not arbitrary but proportional: unmediated contact with absolute holiness is fatal for finite creatures.
13. 'When the ram's horn sounds' (bimshokh hayyovel) — the yovel ('ram's horn,' later the word for 'jubilee') signals transition. Its long blast will mark the moment when the boundary is lifted and approach is permitted. Sacred time is marked by sound.
14. Moses descends and consecrates the people — the prophetic mediator purifies the community for divine encounter. Washing garments is not mere hygiene but ritual symbolism: the people put on readiness.
15. 'Do not go near a woman' — temporary sexual abstinence as part of consecration for theophany. The instruction addresses the men directly and reflects ancient Near Eastern preparation for encountering the divine. The restriction is temporary and situational, not a statement about sexuality's inherent impurity.
16. 'Thunders and lightning and a thick cloud' (qolot uvera'qim ve'anan kaved) — the Sinai theophany is the most overwhelming divine manifestation in the Torah. The elements — sound (qolot, literally 'voices'), light (beraqim, 'lightning'), cloud (anan), and trumpet (qol shofar) — combine to create an experience that overwhelms every sense. The people tremble (vayyecherad) — not casual nervousness but existential dread before the holy.
17. 'To meet God' (liqrat ha'Elohim) — Moses leads the people out to a meeting. The word liqrat implies moving toward someone who is coming toward you. God descends; Israel approaches. The encounter is mutual, though radically asymmetric.

18. 'The LORD descended in fire' (yarad alav YHWH ba'esh) — fire is the primary element of Sinai theophany, as it was at the burning bush (3:2). The mountain smokes 'like the smoke of a kiln' (ke'ashan hakkivshan) — the same kilns where Israel made bricks in Egypt. The instrument of slavery becomes the image of divine glory.
19. 'Moses spoke and God answered in thunder' (Mosheh yedabber veba'Elohim ya'anenu veqol) — the most intimate verse of the theophany. Moses speaks, God answers. The dialogue is personal and direct. The word qol ('voice, thunder') blurs the line between speech and natural phenomenon — God's voice is the storm.
20. God descends to the mountaintop and summons Moses upward. The spatial drama is precise: God comes down; Moses goes up. They meet at the summit. The mountain becomes the axis between heaven and earth.
21. The warning against breaking through (pen-yehersu) reveals both divine holiness and divine concern. God does not want to destroy the curious; He warns them away from what would kill them. The holiness that demands distance is the same holiness that provides warning.
22. Even the priests — those closest to God's service — must consecrate themselves additionally. Proximity to God does not reduce the need for preparation; it increases it.
23. Moses's objection is procedural: boundaries have already been set (v12). The repetition of the warning underscores its gravity — God double-checks that the people understand the danger.
24. Aaron is invited up with Moses — the priestly and prophetic leaders together at the summit. But the people and the other priests must remain below. Access to God is real but regulated.
25. Moses descends to deliver the final warning. The narrative is now positioned for the giving of the Ten Commandments in chapter 20. Every preparation is complete; the people are consecrated, the boundaries are set, the mountain burns, and God is present.

20

Summary: God speaks the Ten Commandments (Aseret HaDibberot, 'The Ten Words') directly to all Israel, beginning with self-identification as the God who liberated them. The commandments move from exclusive loyalty to God through Sabbath observance to right treatment of neighbor. The people, terrified, ask Moses to mediate.

What Makes This Remarkable: The preamble 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt' (v2) establishes that every commandment flows from a prior act of grace — liberation first, then law. The Hebrew chesed ('faithful love,' v6) appears inside the Decalogue itself, set against judgment: three-to-four generations of consequence versus thousands of generations of loyal love. The word qanna ('jealous,' v5) describes passionate exclusive devotion — the jealousy of a covenant partner, not petty envy. The people's fear (v18-19) and request for Moses to mediate establishes the prophetic office.

Translation Friction: The Hebrew devarim ('words') gives the Decalogue its Hebrew name — these are 'words' (declarations of relationship), not merely 'commandments' (legal statutes). We preserved 'commandments' in common references for familiarity but noted the distinction. The phrase al-panai ('before Me/in My presence,' v3) we rendered 'besides Me' to capture the exclusivity claim. The prohibition lo tirtsach (v13) specifically means 'do not murder' (unlawful killing), not 'do not kill' (all killing); we rendered it 'you shall not murder.'

Connections: The Decalogue is restated in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 with significant Sabbath-motivation changes. Jesus summarizes the commandments in Matthew 22:37-40. Paul cites specific commandments in Romans 13:9. The covenant structure (preamble, stipulations, witnesses) parallels ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties. The people's terror at God's voice (v18-19) is cited in Hebrews 12:18-21.

1God spoke all these words, saying, 2"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3You must not have any other gods besides Me. 4You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, 6but showing faithful love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. 7You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold guiltless anyone who takes His name in vain. 8Keep the Sabbath day in remembrance and set it apart as holy. 9Six days you shall

labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work — you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. ¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁴You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." ¹⁵All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking. When the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁶They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." ¹⁷Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that the fear of Him may be before you, that you may not sin." ¹⁸The people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken with you from heaven. ²⁰You shall not make gods of silver alongside Me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold. ²¹An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. ²²If you make for Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your chisel on it, you profane it. ²³You shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness is not exposed on it."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. 'God spoke all these words' (vaydabber Elohim et kol-haddevarim ha'elleh) — the Ten Commandments are introduced as God's own direct speech. The word *devarim* ('words') gives the Hebrew name for the Decalogue: *Aseret HaDibberot* ("The Ten Words"). These are not commandments in the sense of legal statutes but declarations of covenant relationship.
2. The preamble identifies the speaker and establishes the relationship: 'I am the LORD your God' (*anokhi YHWH Elohekha*). Before any command is given, identity is declared. The exodus is the credential: 'who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.' Every commandment that follows is grounded in this prior act of liberation. Obedience is response to grace, not the condition for it.
3. 'No other gods before Me' (*lo yihyeh-lekha elohim acherim al-panai*) — the phrase *al-panai* literally means 'before My face' or 'in My presence.' The commandment does not deny other gods exist (that is a later theological development); it demands exclusive loyalty. In a world of many gods, Israel's God demands undivided allegiance.
4. The prohibition of carved images (*pesel*) extends to 'any likeness' (*kol-temunah*) of anything in the three-tiered cosmos: heaven, earth, and water below the earth. The scope is comprehensive — no physical representation of deity is permitted. The prohibition targets not all art but specifically images made for worship.
5. 'A jealous God' (*El qanna*) — the word *qanna* describes passionate, exclusive devotion. It is the jealousy of a husband for his wife, not petty envy. God's jealousy is the emotional counterpart of the first commandment: exclusive loyalty demanded because exclusive love is given. The generational consequence ('visiting iniquity') describes patterns of sin that perpetuate through family systems, not arbitrary punishment of innocent descendants.
6. 'Showing steadfast love to thousands' (*ve'oseh chesed la'alafim*) — *chesed* appears in the Decalogue itself. The contrast is stark: iniquity is visited to the third and fourth generation, but *chesed* extends to thousands. Judgment is limited; covenant love is boundless. This asymmetry defines God's character: mercy outweighs wrath by orders of magnitude.
7. 'Take the name of the LORD your God in vain' (*tissa et-shem YHWH Elohekha lashshav*) — the verb *nasa* means 'to lift up, to carry, to bear.' To 'bear' God's name in vain (*lashshav*, 'for emptiness, for falsehood, for nothing') means to invoke God's name without substance — in false oaths, empty worship, or as a tool of manipulation. Israel bears God's name; to bear it emptily is to misrepresent God Himself.
8. 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy' (*zakhor et-yom hashabbat leqaddesho*) — the verb *zakhor* ('remember') is active, not passive. Remembering the Sabbath means structuring life around it, not merely noting its existence. 'To keep it holy' (*leqaddesho*) means to set it apart — to treat this day as belonging to God in a way the other six do not.

9. Six days of labor are affirmed — work is not a curse but a mandate. The Sabbath rest is meaningful only against the backdrop of productive labor. The creation pattern (Genesis 1-2:3) governs human life: work, then rest.
10. The Sabbath rest extends to every member of the household — sons, daughters, servants, livestock, and even the resident foreigner (ger). No one in Israel's community is excluded from rest. The sojourner provision is remarkable: even non-Israelites within Israel's territory receive the gift of Sabbath. The commandment has a social-justice dimension: those with power over others must grant them rest.
11. The theological basis is creation: God made everything in six days and rested on the seventh. The Sabbath is not arbitrary but cosmic — it mirrors the rhythm God established at the foundation of the world. Human rest participates in divine rest. The verb *vayyinnach* ('rested') means 'ceased and was refreshed.'
12. 'Honor your father and your mother' (*kabbed et-avikha ve-et-immekha*) — the verb *kabbed* is from the root *kavod* ('glory, weight, honor'). To honor parents is to treat them as weighty — as significant, substantial, deserving of respect. This is the only commandment with a promise attached: 'so that your days may be long.' The commandment bridges the God-directed commands (1-4) and the neighbor-directed commands (6-10): parents stand at the intersection of divine authority and human relationship.
13. Four brief commandments in rapid succession: no murder (*tirtsach* — intentional killing, not all killing), no adultery (*tin'af*), no stealing (*tignov*), no false witness (*ta'aneh... ed shaqer*). Each is a two-word prohibition in Hebrew, compressed to the minimum. The brevity is deliberate: these are absolute, non-negotiable boundaries. The verb *ratsach* is specifically murder — unlawful, intentional killing — not capital punishment or warfare, which the Torah separately addresses.
14. 'You shall not covet' (*lo tachmod*) — the final commandment addresses the interior life: desire, not action. *Chamad* means to desire, to take delight in, to want what belongs to another. The commandment moves from external behavior (murder, adultery, theft) to internal disposition (covetousness). The list — house, wife, servant, ox, donkey, 'anything' — is comprehensive, ending with *kol asher lere'ekha* ('anything that belongs to your neighbor').
15. 'The people perceived the thunder' (*ve'khol-ha'am ro'im et-haqqolot*) — the verb *ra'ah* ('to see') is used for perceiving sound: they 'saw' the thunder. The synesthetic language suggests an experience so overwhelming it crossed sensory boundaries. The theophany is not merely heard but perceived with the whole person.
16. 'Do not let God speak to us, or we will die' (*ve'al-yedabber immanu Elohim pen-namut*) — the people's terror leads them to request mediation. They want Moses as buffer between themselves and the direct voice of God. This request establishes the prophetic office: Israel will hear God's word through Moses (and later prophets) rather than directly. The people's fear, while understandable, represents a step back from the intimacy God offered.
17. Moses reframes the fear: God's coming is 'to test you' (*lenassot etkhem*) and 'so that the fear of Him may be before you' (*uv'avur tihyeh yir'ato al-peneikhem*). There are two kinds of fear: the terror that drives away (which Moses says to reject) and the reverent awe that prevents sin (which Moses says to embrace). The distinction between fear-as-terror and fear-as-reverence is foundational to biblical wisdom.
18. 'Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was' (*uMosheh niggash el-ha'arafel asher-sham ha'Elohim*) — while the people retreat, Moses advances. The *arafel* ('thick darkness, deep gloom') is where God dwells. God's presence is simultaneously light to the trusting and darkness to the afraid. Moses enters the darkness; the people stand at a distance.
19. 'You have seen that I have spoken with you from heaven' (*atem re'item ki min-hashamayim dibbarti immakhem*) — God reminds Israel that the theophany came from heaven, not from any earthly image. The prohibition of images (v20) flows directly from the nature of the revelation: God spoke from heaven, invisible. Any image would reduce the heavenly God to an earthly object.
20. 'Gods of silver... gods of gold' (*elohei khesef... elohei zahav*) — the materials are significant. Silver and gold are the very materials Israel took from Egypt (12:35-36). The wealth of liberation must not become the material of idolatry. What God provided for the tabernacle (25:3) must not be redirected to false worship.
21. 'An altar of earth' (*mizbach adamah*) — the simplest possible altar. No ornamentation, no craftsmanship — just soil shaped into a platform. The altar law emphasizes accessibility and humility: worship does not require architectural grandeur. 'In every place where I cause My name to be remembered' (*bekhol-hamaqom asher azkir et-shemi*) — God chooses the place of worship, not the worshiper.
22. 'If you wield your chisel on it, you profane it' (*ki charbkha henafta aleha vatechalelehah*) — the tool (*cherev*, also meaning 'sword') profanes the stone. Instruments of human violence and craftsmanship must not shape God's altar. The altar is natural, uncut, unhewn — shaped by God's creation, not human artifice.
23. The prohibition of steps prevents exposure of the priest's body — a practical modesty provision. The altar is approached by a ramp, not by stairs. Every detail of worship protects the dignity of both the worshiper and the act of worship.

21

Summary: *The Book of the Covenant begins with case-law (mishpatim) governing servitude, personal injury, property damage, and the rights of the vulnerable. A Hebrew bonded worker goes free in the seventh year. The lex talionis ('eye for eye') establishes proportional justice.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The very first case-law concerns the eved ivri ('Hebrew bonded worker'), embedding liberation at the foundation of Israel's legal code — a people freed from slavery must regulate power over others. The six-year servitude limit with seventh-year release mirrors the Sabbath pattern; even labor relationships carry a built-in horizon of freedom. The lex talionis (vv23-25) is not a license for vengeance but a ceiling on punishment: the penalty must not exceed the injury.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered mishpatim as 'case-rulings' rather than 'judgments' or 'ordinances' to distinguish these casuistic laws ('if... then...') from the apodictic commands ('you shall not...') of the Decalogue. The word eved ('servant/slave') covers a wide semantic range; we chose 'bonded worker' for the Hebrew context of debt-servitude, distinguishing it from chattel slavery. The phrase 'eye for eye' (ayin tachat ayin, v24) we retained literally, noting in our translator notes that it establishes proportionality, not mandatory mutilation.*

Connections: *The seventh-year release connects to Deuteronomy 15:12-18 and Jeremiah 34:8-22. Jesus cites the lex talionis in Matthew 5:38-39. The goring ox laws (vv28-32) establish precedent for negligence liability throughout biblical and later legal traditions. The protection of the vulnerable (vv20-21, 26-27) operationalizes the exodus principle: because God freed you, you must not crush others.*

¹These are the case-rulings that you are to place before them: ²When you acquire a Hebrew bonded worker, he will serve for six years, but in the seventh year he goes free without payment. ³If he entered alone, he leaves alone. If he is a married man, his wife leaves with him. ⁴If his master gave him a wife and she bore him sons or daughters, the woman and her children belong to her master, and the man leaves alone. ⁵But if the bonded worker clearly declares, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children — I will not go free,' ⁶then his master brings him before God, and brings him to the door or the doorpost, and his master pierces his ear with an awl — and he will serve him permanently. ⁷When a man sells his daughter as a bonded woman, she does not go free in the same way as the male workers do. ⁸If she is displeasing to her master who designated her for himself, he must allow her to be redeemed. He has no authority to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her. ⁹If he designates her for his son, he must treat her according to the rights of daughters. ¹⁰If he takes another wife for himself, he must not reduce her food, her clothing, or her marital rights. ¹¹If he does not provide these three things for her, she goes free without any payment. ¹²Whoever strikes a person fatally must be put to death. ¹³But if he did not hunt him down, and God let it happen by his hand, then I will designate a place for you where he may flee. ¹⁴But when a man plots deliberately against his neighbor to kill him by treachery, you must take him even from my altar to die. ¹⁵Whoever strikes his father or his mother must be put to death. ¹⁶Whoever kidnaps a person — whether he has sold him or the victim is still found in his possession — must be put to death. ¹⁷Whoever curses his father or his mother must be put to death. ¹⁸When men quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and the victim does not die but is confined to bed — ¹⁹if the victim gets up and walks around outside on his own support, the striker is cleared — only he must compensate for the lost time and pay fully for healing. ²⁰When a man strikes his male or female servant with a rod and the servant dies immediately, the master must be held accountable. ²¹However, if the servant survives a day or two, the master is not punished, because the servant is his financial investment. ²²When men are fighting and they injure a pregnant woman so that her children come out prematurely but no lasting harm occurs, the offender must pay a fine as the woman's husband demands, subject to judicial assessment. ²³But if lasting harm does occur, then the penalty is life for life, ²⁴an eye in place of an eye, a tooth in place of a tooth, a hand in place of a hand, a foot in place of a foot, ²⁵burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. ²⁶If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant and destroys it, he must release the servant as a free person in compensation for the eye. ²⁷And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he must release the servant as a

free person in compensation for the tooth. ²⁸When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten, but the owner of the ox is clear. ²⁹But if the ox was known to gore in the past, and its owner was warned but did not keep it restrained, and it kills a man or a woman — the ox is stoned, and its owner also must be put to death. ³⁰If a ransom payment is imposed on him instead, he must pay whatever is set as the redemption price for his life. ³¹Whether it gores a son or a daughter, the same ruling applies to the owner. ³²If the ox gores a male or female servant, the owner must pay thirty silver shekels to the servant's master, and the ox is stoned. ³³When a man opens a cistern, or when a man digs a cistern and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it — ³⁴the owner of the cistern must pay compensation — he returns silver to the animal's owner, and the dead animal becomes his. ³⁵When one man's ox fatally injures another man's ox, they sell the living ox and split the proceeds equally, and they also split the dead animal equally. ³⁶But if it was known that the ox was a habitual gorer and its owner did not keep it restrained, he must pay in full — ox for ox — and the dead animal becomes his. ³⁷When a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay five cattle in place of the ox and four sheep in place of the sheep.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *mishpatim* ('case-rulings') signals a shift from the apodictic commands of the Decalogue to casuistic law — practical applications structured as 'if... then...' scenarios. These rulings operationalize the covenant principles of chapters 19–20 into daily community life.
2. The Hebrew *eved ivri* ('Hebrew bonded worker') refers to debt-servitude, not chattel slavery. The six-year limit with mandatory release in the seventh echoes the Sabbath pattern — even labor relationships must have a built-in horizon of liberation. A people who were themselves freed from bondage may not hold permanent power over their own.
3. The term *begappo* ('by his body alone') indicates arriving without dependents. The principle is that servitude cannot dissolve a marriage that existed before the labor arrangement — the prior family bond is protected.
4. This verse creates the painful tension that drives verses 5–6. A wife provided by the master during the service period remains part of the master's household. The law does not celebrate this arrangement — it sets up the moral weight of the choice that follows.
5. The emphatic Hebrew construction *amor yomar* ('saying, he says') stresses that this must be a deliberate, repeated declaration — not a coerced statement. The worker chooses permanent attachment out of love for his family, not fear. The verb 'love' (*ahav*) is the same word used for covenant loyalty throughout the Torah.
6. The phrase *el ha'Elohim* ('before God' or 'before the judges') indicates a formal legal proceeding with divine witness. Piercing the ear at the doorpost marks the threshold between freedom and chosen belonging. The ear — the organ of hearing — is marked because the worker heard the call to freedom but chose to stay. *Le'olam* ('permanently') in context means for the duration of his life, not eternally.
7. A father in extreme poverty might arrange his daughter into a household with the expectation that she would become a wife or concubine, not simply a laborer. The different release terms reflect this expectation — she has marriage protections rather than a simple six-year term, as the following verses specify.
8. The *ketiv-qere* (written/read) textual variant *lo/lo* shows an ancient scribal ambiguity: 'who did not designate her' vs. 'who designated her for himself.' Either reading yields the same protective result — if the arrangement fails, she cannot be trafficked to outsiders. The phrase *bigdo-vah* ('he broke faith with her') uses covenant-betrayal language.
9. Once designated for the son, the woman gains full daughter-status in the household. This elevates her from servant to family member with legal protections — she is not a disposable laborer but a recognized member of the household with rights.
10. The three obligations — *she'erah* (food/sustenance), *kesutah* (clothing), and *onatah* (conjugal rights) — form the baseline rights of a wife in Israelite law. Even if displaced by a second wife, these cannot be withdrawn. The term *onatah* specifically protects her sexual and relational dignity.
11. Failure to meet any of the three basic obligations — sustenance, clothing, marital rights — voids the arrangement entirely. The woman walks away with no debt owed. This functions as an ancient breach-of-contract remedy that protects the weaker party.
12. The shift from civil-family law to capital offenses marks a new section. The Hebrew uses the emphatic *mot yumat* ('dying, he shall die') to underscore the absolute nature of the penalty. The word *ish* ('person') here is generic — the law applies regardless of the victim's status or gender.
13. The verb *tsadah* ('hunted, stalked') distinguishes premeditated killing from accidental death. The phrase 'God let it happen by his hand' (*ha'Elohim innah leyado*) attributes the accidental convergence to divine providence, not the killer's intent. The cities of refuge (expanded in Numbers 35 and Deuteronomy 19) provide asylum from blood-avengers for unintentional killers.
14. The verb *yazid* ('acts presumptuously, boils over with intent') combined with *ormah* ('cunning, treachery') defines first-degree murder. Not even the sanctuary altar can protect a premeditated killer — sacred space does not override justice. This limits the asylum principle of verse 13 to genuinely accidental cases.

15. Physical violence against parents is treated as a capital offense because it violates the foundational social bond. The fifth commandment (honor your father and mother) is operationalized here at its extreme — the parental relationship represents covenant order in miniature.
16. This law criminalizes human trafficking with the death penalty. The verb ganav ('steal') when applied to a person means kidnapping. Both selling the victim and retaining him are equally capital offenses. This statute directly contradicts any attempt to use the Torah to justify chattel slavery.
17. The verb meqallel ('makes light of, curses') is the opposite of kavod ('give weight, honor'). Cursing parents invokes harm against the very people the commandments require one to honor. The pairing of this verse with verse 15 (striking parents) shows that both verbal and physical violations of parental honor carry identical weight.
18. The law now turns to non-fatal assault. The Hebrew distinguishes weapons (stone) from bare hands (fist), indicating that the degree of force matters less than the outcome. The phrase nafal lemishkav ('falls to his bed') describes incapacitation requiring recovery time.
19. Walking outside 'on his support' (al mish'anto) means the victim can move independently, even if with a cane. The attacker must cover two categories of damages: shivto ('his sitting' — lost wages/productivity) and medical costs (rapo yerappeh, 'healing, he shall heal'). This is one of the earliest recorded principles of compensatory damages in legal history.
20. The emphatic naqom yinnaqem ('avenging, he shall be avenged') means the servant's death is treated as a punishable homicide. In the surrounding ancient Near East, killing one's own slave generally carried no legal consequence. This law is extraordinary for its time — a master's authority over a servant does not include the right to kill.
21. The survival period creates a rebuttable presumption: if death is not immediate, the beating may not have been intended to kill. The rationale ki kaspo hu ('because he is his money') is not a moral endorsement but a legal observation — the master has economic self-interest against killing his own worker. Ancient readers understood this as a limitation on punishment, not an approval of violence.
22. The phrase veyatze'u yeladeyha ('her children come out') describes premature birth caused by the blow. The key term ason ('lasting harm, catastrophe') distinguishes between a premature but viable delivery and a fatal outcome. The husband sets the initial claim, but pelilim ('arbitrators, judges') determine the final amount — protecting against both undervaluation and extortion.
23. The lex talionis ('law of retaliation') begins here. Nefesh takhat nefesh ('life in place of life') sets the principle of proportional justice — the punishment must match the injury, no more and no less. Rabbinic tradition understood this as monetary compensation equivalent to the value of the injury, not literal physical mutilation.
24. The talionic formula establishes strict proportionality: an eye — not a life — for an eye. Far from endorsing brutality, this principle limits revenge. In surrounding cultures, a powerful man who lost an eye might kill the offender's entire family. Here, the injury itself sets the maximum penalty. The Talmud (Bava Kamma 83b–84a) interprets this as requiring monetary compensation equal to the injury.
25. The three additional pairs — burn (keviyyah), wound (petsa), bruise (khabburah) — extend the proportionality principle to every category of bodily harm. The descending severity (from burn to bruise) signals that even minor injuries carry legal consequences. No harm is too small for justice.
26. The talionic principle is applied to servants — but instead of 'eye for eye,' the remedy is freedom. The loss of a bodily member earns permanent liberation. This transforms the master-servant relationship: physical abuse literally costs the master his workforce. The verb shikhhatah ('destroyed, ruined it') implies irreversible damage.
27. Even a tooth — far less significant than an eye — triggers mandatory manumission. The rabbis extended this principle: any permanent bodily damage to a servant results in freedom. The consistent remedy of liberation for injury creates a powerful economic disincentive against abuse.
28. The goring-ox laws (verses 28–36) establish the principle of owner liability for known dangers. In the first-offense case, the ox is destroyed (stoned, not slaughtered — so its meat is forbidden), but the owner bears no criminal guilt since the danger was unknown. The prohibition against eating the carcass treats a man-killing animal as profane.
29. The critical distinction is prior knowledge: mitmol shilshom ('from yesterday and the day before') means the animal had a documented pattern. The owner was hu'ad ('testified to, warned') — a formal legal notice. Negligence after warning transforms accidental harm into a capital offense. This establishes the foundational legal concept of culpable negligence.
30. The kofer ('ransom, atonement payment') allows monetary substitution for the death penalty in negligence cases. The word pidyon ('redemption price') connects this to the broader theology of ransom — a life-price paid in place of forfeited life. The amount is set by judicial assessment, not the negligent owner.
31. The explicit mention of both son and daughter establishes that gender does not affect the legal outcome. A child's life carries the same judicial weight as an adult's, and a daughter's life the same as a son's — a statement of legal equality unusual in the ancient Near East.
32. Thirty shekels of silver was the standard valuation for a servant in the ancient Near East. This fixed amount means the owner cannot negotiate the price down. The ox is still destroyed, confirming that even a servant's death defiles the animal. Later tradition links this sum to Zechariah 11:12 and the betrayal price in the Gospels.
33. The bor ('pit, cistern') laws extend negligence liability to property hazards. Whether uncovering an existing pit or digging a new one, the duty to cover the danger rests on the person who created or exposed it. Ancient cisterns were deep enough to injure or kill livestock that fell in.

34. The negligent pit-owner pays the full value of the lost animal, then keeps the carcass. This prevents double recovery — the animal owner receives the market value but does not also keep the dead animal. The principle of offsetting damages is built into the remedy.
35. For a first-offense ox-on-ox incident, both owners share the loss equally — each gets half of both the surviving animal's sale price and the dead animal's salvage value. This splits the risk between both parties when no negligence can be proven.
36. When prior knowledge is established (the 'habitual gorer' pattern), the loss-sharing of verse 35 no longer applies. The negligent owner bears the entire cost: he pays for a replacement animal at full value and absorbs the dead animal's loss. Knowledge of danger plus failure to act equals full liability.
37. The higher penalty for an ox (fivefold vs. fourfold for sheep) reflects the greater economic loss — an ox is a capital asset used for plowing and transport, while a sheep's primary value is consumable (wool, meat). The differential penalty recognizes that theft of productive tools causes compounding economic damage beyond the animal's market price. This verse is Hebrew 21:37 but corresponds to KJV 22:1 due to differing chapter divisions.

22

Summary: Case-law continues with theft, property damage, restitution, seduction, sorcery, bestiality, and idolatry. The chapter then shifts to protecting the vulnerable — sojourners, widows, orphans — with God declaring 'I will surely hear their cry.' Interest on loans to the poor is forbidden.

What Makes This Remarkable: The self-defense statute (vv1-2) is one of the earliest codified in any legal system: killing an intruder at night incurs no bloodguilt, but killing in daylight does, because alternatives exist. Restitution is calculated at top quality (meitav, 'the best,' v5) — the negligent party cannot compensate with inferior goods. The theological grounding for protecting the sojourner is visceral: 'for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt' (v21). Israel's own trauma becomes the basis for its ethics.

Translation Friction: The word makhteret ('tunnel/breach-point,' v1) describes a thief breaking through mud-brick walls — we rendered it 'tunneling in' to convey the method. The phrase ein lo damim ('there is no blood for him,' v2) required paraphrase as 'there is no bloodguilt' to clarify the legal concept. The transition from property law to ethical command in vv21-27 was challenging to render smoothly, since the Hebrew shifts register from casuistic to direct address; we maintained the shift to preserve the text's own movement from courtroom to conscience.

Connections: The sojourner protection recalls Deuteronomy 10:18-19 and is cited in the prophets (Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5). The prohibition of interest on loans to the poor (v25) is expanded in Leviticus 25:35-37 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20. The declaration 'I am compassionate' (v27) connects to the divine self-description of 34:6. The command not to revile God or curse a ruler (v28) is cited by Paul in Acts 23:5.

1If a thief is caught tunneling in and is struck and killed, there is no bloodguilt for his death. 2If the sun has risen on him, there is bloodguilt for killing him. The thief must make full restitution; if he has nothing, he is sold for his theft. 3If the stolen animal is actually found alive in his possession — whether ox, donkey, or sheep — he pays double. 4When a man lets his livestock graze in a field or vineyard, and sends his animal to feed in someone else's field, he must pay restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. 5When fire breaks out and catches in thornbushes, and stacked grain or standing grain or the entire field is consumed, the one who started the fire must make full restitution. 6When a man gives his neighbor money or goods for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the man's house — if the thief is caught, the thief pays double. 7If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house must come before God to determine whether he himself took his neighbor's property. 8In any case of disputed ownership — whether over an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or any lost item — where someone claims, 'This is mine,' the case of both parties comes before God. Whichever one God finds guilty must pay double to his neighbor. 9When a man gives his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to look after, and it dies, or is injured, or is carried off, with no witness present — 10an oath before the LORD must stand between them both — that the custodian did not misappropriate his neighbor's property. The owner must accept this, and no restitution is owed. 11 But if it is in fact stolen from his custody, he must pay restitution to its owner. 12If it was torn apart by a predator, let him

bring the remains as evidence — he does not pay for the torn animal. ¹³When a man borrows an animal from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not present, the borrower must pay in full. ¹⁴If the owner was present with it, the borrower does not pay. If it was a hired animal, the loss is covered by the rental fee. ¹⁵When a man seduces a young woman who is not betrothed and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price and take her as his wife. ¹⁶If her father firmly refuses to give her to him, the man must still pay the full amount of the bride-price for young women. ¹⁷You must not let a sorceress live. ¹⁸Anyone who lies with an animal must be put to death. ¹⁹Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD alone must be completely destroyed. ²⁰You must not mistreat or oppress a resident foreigner, because you yourselves were foreigners in the land of Egypt. ²¹You must not afflict any widow or orphan. ²²If you do afflict them in any way, and they cry out to me at all, I will surely hear their cry. ²³Then my anger will burn hot, and I will kill you by the sword — and your own wives will become widows and your own children orphans. ²⁴If you lend money to any of my people — the poor among you — you must not act as a creditor toward him. You must not charge him interest. ²⁵If you take your neighbor's garment as collateral, you must return it to him before the sun sets. ²⁶For it is his only covering — it is his garment for his skin. What else would he sleep in? And when he cries out to me, I will hear, because I am compassionate. ²⁷You must not curse God, and you must not curse a leader among your people. ²⁸You must not hold back your harvest fullness or your flowing produce. The firstborn of your sons you must give to me. ²⁹Do the same with your cattle and your flock: for seven days the young animal stays with its mother; on the eighth day you give it to me. ³⁰You are to be people set apart as holy to me. You must not eat the flesh of an animal torn by predators in the field — throw it to the dogs.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The makhteret ('tunnel, breach point') describes a thief breaking through mud-brick walls at night. The phrase *ein lo damim* ('there is no blood for him') means the homeowner bears no legal guilt for killing an intruder in darkness — the threat is presumed lethal when you cannot see whether the intruder is armed. This is one of the earliest codified self-defense statutes.
2. Daylight changes the legal calculus: once you can see the intruder, you can assess whether lethal force is necessary. Killing a thief in broad daylight creates bloodguilt because non-lethal options exist. The thief's penalty is full restitution or, if insolvent, being sold into debt-servitude — the same bondage system regulated in 21:2–6.
3. The emphatic *himmatse timmatse* ('finding, it is found') stresses certainty of evidence. When the stolen animal is recovered alive and intact, the penalty drops to twofold — much less than the four- or fivefold penalty when the animal has been slaughtered or sold (21:37). Recovery of the property reduces the damages owed.
4. The verb *bi'er* ('to graze, to consume') creates a wordplay: the man who let his animal *bi'er* (consume) another's field pays from his *meitav* (best). Restitution is calculated at top quality, not average — the negligent party cannot pay with inferior produce. This protects the victim from receiving substandard compensation.
5. Fire liability follows the chain of causation: even if the fire spread through thorns (an intermediate cause), the person who lit it bears full responsibility for everything destroyed. The list — stacked grain, standing grain, the field itself — covers all stages of agricultural production. Fire in an arid climate could devastate an entire community's food supply.
6. The deposit (*piqqadon*) laws begin here and run through verse 14. These regulate bailment — entrusting property to another person's care. When the thief is identified, liability falls on the actual criminal, not the custodian. The double payment matches the standard restitution for recovered theft.
7. When the thief is unknown, suspicion naturally falls on the custodian. The phrase *el ha'Elohim* ('before God') indicates either a divine oath at the sanctuary or a judicial proceeding — the custodian must swear his innocence under divine witness. The phrase *shalakh yado* ('extended his hand') is an idiom for misappropriation.
8. This verse generalizes the deposit principle into a universal dispute-resolution procedure. The word *pesha* ('violation, breach of trust') covers any contested property claim. The divine tribunal (Elohim) renders the verdict — human judges act as God's agents in civil disputes. Double payment serves both as penalty and deterrent.
9. This section addresses animal bailment — custody of living property. Three scenarios are listed: death, injury (*nishbar*, 'broken'), and seizure (*nishbah*, 'captured, driven off'). The critical factor is *ein ro'eh* ('no one seeing') — when there is no independent witness, the case requires a divine oath to resolve.
10. The *shevu'at YHVH* ('oath of the LORD') is the most solemn form of sworn testimony in Israelite law. Swearing falsely by God's name invokes divine judgment on the perjurer. When no human evidence exists, the oath functions as the final legal instrument — the owner must accept it, and the case is closed.

11. If it can be established that the animal was stolen while under the custodian's care, the custodian is liable — he should have secured the animal against theft. The oath defense of verse 10 only covers cases where the custodian acted in good faith. Proven theft from custody implies negligent safeguarding.
12. A wild animal attack (taraf, 'torn apart') is an act beyond human control. The custodian demonstrates his innocence by producing physical evidence — the mangled remains. This early forensic principle requires tangible proof of the claim. The word terefa ('torn carcass') later becomes a key term in dietary law for meat rendered unfit by violent death.
13. Borrowing (she'al) carries a higher standard of care than paid custody. The borrower benefits solely from the arrangement, so he bears full liability for any loss. The owner's absence (be'alav ein immo) removes any possibility that the owner's own negligence contributed to the damage.
14. When the owner is present, he shares responsibility for the animal's safety, so the borrower is not solely liable. For hired animals, the risk of loss is already factored into the rental price (ba biskharo, 'it came with its fee'). These distinctions show ancient Israel developing sophisticated categories of commercial liability.
15. The verb yefatfeh ('entice, persuade') describes seduction, not coercion — rape is addressed separately in Deuteronomy 22:25–27. The mohar ('bride-price') is the payment to the father's household that formalizes marriage. The law holds the man accountable for the sexual relationship by requiring him to formalize the union and bear its economic obligations.
16. The emphatic ma'en yema'en ('refusing, he refuses') gives the father unilateral veto power over the marriage. Even when the father blocks the union, the seducer still owes the full bride-price — he cannot escape financial responsibility by being rejected. The woman's family is compensated regardless of the marriage outcome.
17. The feminine form mekhashshefah ('sorceress, practitioner of harmful magic') uses the root k-sh-f, which refers to manipulative sorcery intended to harm others — not herbal medicine or midwifery. The feminine form may reflect the social reality that women were the primary practitioners of this type of magic in the ancient Near East, though Deuteronomy 18:10 applies the prohibition to both genders.
18. Sexual contact with animals violates the created order of distinct kinds established in Genesis 1. The death penalty places this alongside murder and kidnapping in severity. The prohibition appears repeatedly in Leviticus 18:23 and 20:15–16, where it is called tavel ('perversion, confusion of categories').
19. The verb yokhoram ('put under the ban, devoted to destruction') is from the root kh-r-m, denoting total consecration to God through destruction. Idolatrous sacrifice receives the same penalty as the banned items of holy war. The phrase bilti laYHVH levaddo ('except to the LORD alone') reinforces the exclusive covenant claim of the first commandment.
20. The two verbs toneh ('mistreat, exploit') and tilkhatseenu ('crush, oppress') cover both social abuse and economic exploitation. The ger ('resident foreigner') is someone living permanently among Israelites without clan protection. The motivation clause — 'you were foreigners in Egypt' — grounds ethical obligation in lived memory. Israel's own suffering under foreign rule becomes the moral foundation for how they treat outsiders.
21. The almanah ('widow') and yatom ('orphan, fatherless') represent people who have lost their primary economic protector in a patriarchal society. The verb te'annun ('afflict, cause to suffer') covers any exploitation of their vulnerable status. The kol ('any') makes the prohibition absolute — there are no exceptions.
22. Three emphatic infinitive constructions pile up: anneh te'anneh ('afflicting, you afflict'), tsa'oq yits'aq ('crying out, they cry out'), shamoah eshma ('hearing, I will hear'). God personally guarantees that the cries of the vulnerable reach divine ears. This is the same verb (tsa'aq) used for Israel's cry under Pharaoh — God heard then, and God hears now.
23. The punishment mirrors the crime with devastating precision: those who afflict widows and orphans will themselves create widows and orphans from their own families. This measure-for-measure principle (middah keneged middah) appears throughout the Torah. God does not merely prohibit — God threatens to become the avenger of the powerless.
24. The phrase et ammi et he'ani immakh ('my people, the poor one beside you') makes poverty personal: the borrower is 'my people' to God and 'beside you' to the lender. The word nosheh ('creditor, debt-collector') describes aggressive collection tactics. Neshekh ('interest,' literally 'a bite') reveals how the Torah views lending at interest to the vulnerable — as a predatory act that devours the borrower.
25. The outer garment (salmah) served as a blanket for sleeping in the cold Judean nights. Taking it as a pledge for a daytime loan was permissible, but keeping it overnight would leave the debtor exposed to the elements. The law prioritizes human survival over creditor rights — the debt is real, but so is the borrower's body.
26. God's self-identification as khannun ('compassionate, gracious') grounds the entire lending ethic in divine character. The rhetorical question 'What would he sleep in?' forces the creditor to see through the debtor's eyes. The same cry-and-hear pattern from the widow/orphan passage (v. 22) reappears — God positions himself as the guarantor of the poor person's rights.
27. The word Elohim here likely means 'God' rather than 'judges,' since the parallel with nasi ('leader, prince') creates a pair: divine authority and human authority. The verb teqalleh ('make light of, curse') is the same root used in verse 17 (cursing parents). Respect for legitimate authority — divine and communal — is a covenant obligation.
28. The unusual words mele'atekha ('your fullness') and dim'akha ('your flow, your tears') likely refer to grain at full ripeness and fresh-pressed juice or oil. Not delaying means giving the first portion promptly — before you consume or sell the rest. The firstborn-son obligation (redeemed by

substitution per Exodus 13:13) declares that all fertility belongs to God first.

29. The seven-day waiting period serves both practical and theological purposes — newborn animals need their mother's milk to survive the first week, and the eight-day timing echoes circumcision (Genesis 17:12). The Sabbath rhythm permeates even animal husbandry: seven days of nature, then consecration on the eighth.
30. The chapter's closing verse reframes all the preceding laws under one identity statement: *anshei qodesh* ('people of holiness'). Holiness is not an abstract status but a lived distinction visible even in diet. Torn flesh (*terefa*) carries the violence of its death — consuming it blurs the boundary between orderly covenant life and the chaos of predation. The dogs, as unclean scavengers, receive what holy people may not eat.

23

Summary: *The Book of the Covenant concludes with justice provisions (no false reports, no mob justice, impartiality), the three annual pilgrimage festivals, sabbatical year rest for the land, and God's promise to send an angel to guide Israel into the promised land.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The principle 'Do not follow the majority to do evil' (v2) is remarkable for any legal code — truth is not determined by vote. The obligation to return even an enemy's lost animal (v4-5) subordinates private hostility to communal responsibility. The three festivals — Unleavened Bread, Harvest, and Ingathering (vv14-17) — structure Israel's year around gratitude. The prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk (v19) has generated centuries of interpretation and shapes Jewish dietary practice to this day.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered *lo-tihyeh acharei-rabbim lera'ot* as 'you shall not follow the majority to do evil,' preserving the legal force while making the principle accessible. The phrase *shema shav* ('false report,' v1) — literally 'empty/vain hearing' — targets both fabrication and circulation of falsehood; we noted both dimensions. The *kid-in-mother's-milk* prohibition (v19) we rendered literally, as the Hebrew gives no explanation and every interpretive expansion risks overreach.*

Connections: *The three festivals connect to Deuteronomy 16:1-17. The sabbatical year (v10-11) is expanded in Leviticus 25. The angel-guide promise (vv20-23) relates to 32:34-33:3. The hornet (v28) reappears in Deuteronomy 7:20 and Joshua 24:12. The gradual dispossession principle (v30) shapes the conquest narrative in Joshua.*

¹You shall not spread a false report. Do not join hands with a wicked person to be a malicious witness. ²You shall not follow the majority to do evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute by siding with the majority to pervert justice. ³Nor shall you show partiality to a poor person in his dispute. ⁴If you encounter your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely return it to him. ⁵If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall not leave him with it. You shall surely help him with it. ⁶You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their disputes. ⁷Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty. ⁸You shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of the righteous. ⁹You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ¹⁰For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, ¹¹but in the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat. What they leave, the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. ¹²Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your female servant and the sojourner may be refreshed. ¹³Pay attention to everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the name of other gods; let it not be heard on your lips. ¹⁴Three times a year you shall celebrate a feast to Me. ¹⁵You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in it you came out of Egypt. No one shall appear before Me empty-handed. ¹⁶You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your produce from the field. ¹⁷Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. ¹⁸You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened, and the fat of My festival shall not remain until morning. ¹⁹The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's

milk. ²⁰"I am sending an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. ²¹Pay attention to him and listen to his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not forgive your transgression, for My name is in him. ²²But if you carefully listen to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. ²³For My angel will go before you and bring you to the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I will annihilate them. ²⁴You shall not bow down to their gods or serve them, nor do as they do. You shall utterly demolish them and smash their sacred pillars. ²⁵You shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water, and I will remove sickness from your midst. ²⁶No woman in your land shall miscarry or be barren. I will fulfill the number of your days. ²⁷I will send My terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every people you encounter, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. ²⁸I will send the hornet ahead of you, and it will drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites before you. ²⁹I will not drive them out before you in a single year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. ³⁰Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land. ³¹I will set your borders from the Sea of Reeds to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. ³²You shall not make a covenant with them or with their gods. ³³They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me; for if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Book of the Covenant continues with justice provisions. 'False report' (shema shav) — literally 'empty/vain hearing.' The prohibition targets both the one who fabricates the report and the one who receives and spreads it. Justice depends on truthful information.
2. 'Do not follow the majority to do evil' (lo-tihyeh acharei-rabbim lera'ot) — a remarkable principle: majority opinion does not determine justice. Truth is not a vote. The legal system must resist mob pressure, even democratic mob pressure.
3. Partiality toward the poor is prohibited alongside partiality toward the rich (Leviticus 19:15). Justice requires impartiality, not favoritism in either direction. Compassion for the poor is commanded elsewhere; in court, only facts and law matter.
4. 'Your enemy's ox' — the obligation to return lost property extends even to your personal enemy. The law subordinates private enmity to communal obligation. You cannot let a neighbor's animal suffer because you dislike the neighbor.
5. The obligation extends to helping an enemy's overloaded donkey. The Hebrew is emphatic: azov ta'azov immo ('you shall surely help him'). Personal hatred does not suspend the duty of compassion toward animals and the shared social order.
6. 'Do not pervert justice due to your poor' (lo tatteh mishpat evyonkha) — the verb natah ('to pervert, to turn aside') means bending the legal process away from its straight course. The poor are vulnerable to legal exploitation precisely because they lack resources to advocate for themselves.
7. 'I will not acquit the guilty' (lo atsiq rasha) — God Himself guarantees the ultimate standard of justice. Human courts may fail; the divine court will not. The prohibition against killing the innocent (naqi vetsaddiq) uses two words: naqi ('clean, innocent of the charge') and tsaddiq ('righteous, in the right').
8. 'A bribe blinds the clear-sighted' (hashchohad ye'avver piqqechim) — the word piqqeach means 'open-eyed, seeing clearly.' Even the perceptive become blind when money enters the judicial process. The bribe does not merely influence; it literally impairs moral vision.
9. 'You know the heart of a sojourner' (atem yeda'tem et-nephesh hagger) — literally 'you know the nephesh (soul/inner life) of the stranger.' Israel's own experience of alienation in Egypt is the basis for empathy. Compassion is not abstract principle but remembered experience. This is experiential ethics: because you suffered, you must not inflict.
10. The agricultural sabbatical (shemittah) cycle parallels the weekly Sabbath: six years of work, one year of rest. The land itself receives Sabbath.
11. The purpose of the fallow year is social justice: 'that the poor of your people may eat.' The land's rest benefits the landless. What grows naturally during the sabbatical belongs to anyone who needs it — a redistribution built into the agricultural calendar.
12. The weekly Sabbath rest is restated with an emphasis on those who cannot demand rest for themselves: the ox, the donkey, the servant's son, the sojourner. Sabbath protects the vulnerable from exploitation by those with power over them.
13. 'Do not invoke the name of other gods' (veshem elohim acherim lo tazkiru) — the verb zakar ('mention, invoke, remember') means that the names of foreign gods should not even be spoken in worship or oath-taking. Covenant loyalty excludes all competitors even at the verbal level.
14. Three annual pilgrimage festivals (shalosh regalim, literally 'three feet/times') structure Israel's year. The festivals are agricultural and theological simultaneously: they mark both harvest cycles and covenant events.

15. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Chag HaMatzot) is the first of three. Its connection to the exodus (the month of Aviv, the departure from Egypt) is stated as the reason for observance. 'No one shall appear before Me empty-handed' (velo-yera'u fanai reqam) — worship and offering are inseparable.
16. The Feast of Harvest (Chag HaQatzir, later called Shavuot/Pentecost) celebrates the firstfruits of the wheat harvest. The Feast of Ingathering (Chag HaAsif, later called Sukkot/Tabernacles) marks the final harvest at year's end. The three festivals map Israel's relationship with God onto the agricultural year.
17. 'All your males shall appear before the Lord GOD' (yera'eh kol-zekhurchah el-penei ha'Adon YHWH) — the verb yera'eh can be read as 'appear' (niph'al) or 'see' (qal). The pilgrimage is both appearing before God and seeing God — a mutual encounter at the appointed festivals.
18. Leaven is excluded from the sacrifice, maintaining the Passover principle (ch12). The fat (chelev) of the festival offering must be consumed the same night — nothing sacred may be treated as leftover.
19. 'You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk' (lo-tevashel gedi bachalev immo) — this prohibition, repeated three times in the Torah (here, 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21), became the basis for the Jewish dietary separation of meat and dairy. In its original context, it likely prohibits a specific Canaanite fertility ritual that perverts the relationship between nourishment (milk) and death (slaughter).
20. 'I am sending an angel before you' (hineh anokhi sholeach mal'akh lefanekha) — the angelic guide transitions the chapter from law to promise. God's angel will lead Israel to the promised land. The angel's authority is grounded in the fact that God's name is 'in him' (v21).
21. 'My name is in him' (ki shemi beqirbo) — the angel bears God's own name, giving him divine authority. The phrase suggests an intimate identification between the angel and God Himself. The angel cannot forgive transgression because forgiveness is a divine prerogative that this angel exercises.
22. Obedience to the angel's voice is obedience to God's voice. The conditional promise — 'if you listen... I will be an enemy to your enemies' — ties Israel's military security to covenant faithfulness.
23. The standard six-nation list appears again (cf. 3:8, 17; 13:5). The verb kichad ('annihilate') is severe — the promise includes the displacement of the current inhabitants. This language must be read within the covenant framework where the land grant follows the pattern of Genesis 15:16 (the iniquity of the Amorites reaching its fullness).
24. The prohibition of foreign worship is comprehensive: no bowing, no serving, no imitating. Sacred pillars (matstsevoth) are to be smashed — the physical objects of Canaanite worship must be destroyed, not repurposed.
25. 'He will bless your bread and your water' (uverakh et-lachmekha ve'et-meimekha) — covenant obedience produces material blessing. The basics of sustenance (bread, water) are under God's direct provision. Health ('I will remove sickness') is also covenantal.
26. Fertility and longevity are covenant blessings: no miscarriage, no barrenness, full lifespan. The blessings mirror the curses of Deuteronomy 28 — covenant faithfulness and covenant violation produce opposite outcomes.
27. 'My terror' (et-eimati) — God sends fear ahead of the military advance. The conquest is won psychologically before it is won militarily. The verb hamam ('confuse, throw into confusion') describes divinely induced panic.
28. The 'hornet' (tsir'ah) — whether literal (swarms of insects) or metaphorical (terror, military advance, or even Egypt itself), the effect is the gradual displacement of the inhabitants. God uses natural means under supernatural direction.
29. 'Not in a single year' — the gradual pace of the conquest is explained: too-rapid depopulation would leave the land ecologically unmanageable. Wolves and other wild animals would overrun empty territory. God's strategy accounts for ecological sustainability.
30. 'Little by little' (me'at me'at) — the repeated word emphasizes gradualism. Conquest is not instantaneous but incremental. Patience is built into the divine plan.
31. The borders — Sea of Reeds to the Mediterranean, wilderness to the Euphrates — describe the maximum extent of the promised land, roughly realized under David and Solomon (1 Kings 4:21). This is the Abrahamic land grant restated in its fullest geographic terms.
32. 'You shall not make a covenant with them' (lo tikhrot lahem velohehem berit) — the verb karat ('cut') is the standard covenant-making verb. Israel must not enter into binding agreements with peoples whose religious practices would compromise covenant loyalty.
33. The chapter closes with a warning: coexistence with Canaanite worship will become a 'snare' (moqesh). The metaphor is a bird-trap — once triggered, escape is difficult. Religious compromise begins subtly and ends in captivity.

24

Summary: *The covenant is ratified in blood: Moses builds an altar with twelve pillars, reads the Book of the Covenant, and throws blood on the people. The elders ascend and see God, eating and drinking in His presence. Moses enters the cloud on Sinai for forty days.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The people's unanimous response 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do' (na'aseh, v3, 7) is the covenant acceptance that defines Israel as a constituted community. The blood ceremony (vv6-8) divides the blood between the altar (representing God) and the people — both parties are bound. The elders' vision of God (v10-11) includes the astonishing detail of 'something like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky' (livnat hassappir) beneath God's feet, yet 'God did not lay His hand on them' — they survived the encounter. They ate and drank in God's presence.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered na'aseh as 'we will do' throughout, preserving the active commitment. The phrase livnat hassappir ('pavement of sapphire,' v10) posed a challenge — livnah could mean 'brick-work' or 'pavement,' and sappir may be sapphire or lapis lazuli. We chose 'pavement of sapphire' for its luminous quality. The combination of theophany and meal (v11) is theologically extraordinary; we rendered it straightforwardly, letting the strangeness speak for itself.*

Connections: *The covenant blood ceremony (v8) is cited in Hebrews 9:18-20, where Jesus's blood establishes a new covenant. The seventy elders anticipate Numbers 11:16-25. Moses's forty days on the mountain (v18) parallel Elijah's forty days to Horeb (1 Kings 19:8) and Jesus's forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:2). The sapphire vision connects to Ezekiel 1:26 and 10:1.*

¹Then He said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD — you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel — and worship from a distance. ²Moses alone shall come near to the LORD; the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him." ³Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do." ⁴Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. ⁶Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he threw against the altar. ⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. They said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will obey." ⁸Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." ⁹Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, ¹⁰and they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet was something like a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel. They beheld God, and they ate and drank. ¹²The LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and stay there, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment that I have written for their instruction." ¹³Moses rose with Joshua his attendant, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. ¹⁴He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them." ¹⁵Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. ¹⁶The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days. On the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷The appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the sons of Israel. ¹⁸Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The invitation to approach God is carefully tiered: Moses comes nearest, Aaron and the leaders worship from a distance, the people do not come up at all. Access to God is real but graduated — proximity corresponds to calling and consecration.

2. 'Moses alone shall come near' (uniggash Mosheh levaddo) — the prophetic mediator has unique access. The distinction between Moses and everyone else — including Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders — establishes the singular authority of the Mosaic office.
3. 'All the people answered with one voice' (vayyya'an kol-ha'am qol echad) — the unanimity is emphatic: one voice (qol echad). Israel's covenant acceptance is corporate and consensual. 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do' (kol-haddevarim asher-dibber YHWH na'aseh) — the commitment precedes the formal ratification ceremony. Israel says 'we will do' before the blood is thrown.
4. Moses writes down God's words — the first written Torah. The altar and twelve pillars create a physical covenant space: the altar represents God, the twelve pillars represent the twelve tribes. The covenant ceremony has both parties symbolically present.
5. 'Young men' (na'arei benei Yisra'el) serve as the sacrificial assistants — this is before the Levitical priesthood is established. Any qualified Israelite can offer sacrifice at this stage. The burnt offerings (olot) represent total dedication; the peace offerings (shelamim) represent fellowship — the two together express both surrender and communion.
6. The blood is divided in half: half on the altar (representing God's side), half reserved for the people (v8). The splitting of the blood creates two parties who will be bound by the same blood. The covenant is literally a blood bond — two parties joined by one life-substance.
7. 'We will do and we will obey' (na'aseh venishma) — the most debated phrase in Jewish covenant theology. Israel commits to doing (na'aseh) before hearing fully (nishma). Action precedes understanding. The willingness to obey comes before the complete comprehension of what obedience entails. This is the structure of covenant faith: trust first, then learn.
8. 'The blood of the covenant' (dam habberit) — Moses throws the other half of the blood on the people, declaring that this blood seals the covenant between God and Israel. The altar received its half; the people receive theirs. Both parties are now covered by the same blood. Jesus will echo this phrase at the Last Supper: 'This is my blood of the covenant' (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24).
9. The ascent begins: Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders climb the mountain. The number seventy echoes the seventy persons who entered Egypt (Genesis 46:27) and the seventy nations of Genesis 10 — a representative number suggesting completeness.
10. 'They saw the God of Israel' (vayyir'u et Elohei Yisra'el) — one of the most extraordinary statements in the entire Bible. Human beings see God. The description focuses not on God's form but on what is beneath His feet: 'something like a pavement of sapphire' (ke'ma'aseh livnat hassappir). The sapphire pavement evokes the blue sky — God's footstool is the firmament itself. The description is restrained and awestruck: the narrator does not describe God directly but only the space around His feet.
11. 'He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles' (ve'el-atselei benei Yisra'el lo shalach yado) — the expected consequence of seeing God is death (cf. 33:20). The fact that these leaders survive is presented as remarkable. They 'beheld God' (vayyechezu et-ha'Elohim) — the verb chazah means 'to see in vision, to perceive.' And they ate and drank — a covenant meal in the divine presence. This is the most intimate human-divine encounter in the Torah: seeing God and sharing food before Him.
12. God summons Moses higher still — above the elders' level, into the cloud itself. The purpose: to receive the tablets of stone (luchot ha'even). The law and commandment have been spoken; now they will be written by God's own hand.
13. Joshua accompanies Moses partway — he is called Moses's 'attendant' (mesharet), a word that later describes priestly service. Joshua's role as Moses's closest aide foreshadows his eventual succession.
14. Aaron and Hur are left in charge — the same two who held Moses's arms during the Amalek battle (17:12). The appointment of temporary judges ensures governance continuity during Moses's absence. This arrangement will fail catastrophically in chapter 32.
15. 'The cloud covered the mountain' (vaykhas he'anan et-hahar) — the verb kasah ('cover') suggests total envelopment. The mountain disappears into the cloud of divine presence.
16. 'The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai' (vayyishkon kevod-YHWH al-har Sinai) — the verb shakan ('settled, dwelt, tabernacled') is the root of Shekhinah. God's glory takes up residence on the mountain. The six-day covering followed by the seventh-day call mirrors the creation pattern: God prepares and then speaks. The seventh day is the day of divine voice.
17. 'Like a consuming fire' (ke'esh okheleth) — the kavod of God is visible as fire. The same element that appeared in the burning bush (3:2), led Israel as a pillar (13:21), and descended on Sinai (19:18) is now described as 'consuming.' Kavod is not safe to approach — it is fire that devours. Yet Moses enters it.
18. Moses enters the cloud and remains forty days and forty nights. The number forty marks a period of complete preparation or testing (cf. the flood, 40 days; the wilderness, 40 years; Jesus's temptation, 40 days). The prophet disappears into God's presence — invisible to Israel below — to receive the instructions for the tabernacle.

25

Summary: *God instructs Moses to receive voluntary contributions for the tabernacle and describes the first furnishings: the ark of the covenant overlaid with gold, the mercy seat with two cherubim, the table of the Presence with its bread, and the golden lampstand.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The tabernacle is funded by willing hearts — 'from every person whose heart moves him' (v2) — not compulsory taxation. The word *terumah* ('contribution,' from *rum*, 'to lift up') describes something lifted from one's possessions and given to God. The materials plundered from Egypt (12:35-36) now find their purpose as the raw material for God's dwelling. The mercy seat (*kapporet*, from *kipper*, 'to atone') is described before the ark it covers — the place of atonement is the theological center of the entire structure.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered *terumah* as 'contribution' rather than 'offering' to avoid confusion with sacrificial offerings. The *kapporet* (v17) is traditionally 'mercy seat,' but the Hebrew root *kipper* means 'to cover/atone.' We retained 'mercy seat' as the familiar rendering while noting the atonement semantics. The instruction 'make them according to the pattern (*tavnit*) shown you on the mountain' (v40) we rendered literally — the tabernacle is a copy of a heavenly original, a concept developed in Hebrews 8:5.*

Connections: *The ark design connects to its role in Numbers 10:33-36, Joshua 3:3-17, and 1 Samuel 4-6. The mercy seat as the meeting place between God and Moses (v22) anticipates Leviticus 16 (Day of Atonement). The bread of the Presence (v30) points to John 6:35. The lampstand anticipates Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1:12-13. The heavenly pattern (v40) is cited in Hebrews 8:5.*

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Speak to the sons of Israel, that they take for Me a contribution. From every person whose heart moves him, you shall receive My contribution. ³This is the contribution you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁴blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, fine linen, and goats' hair, ⁵rams' skins dyed red, fine leather, and acacia wood, ⁶oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, ⁷onyx stones and stones for setting, for the ephod and for the breastpiece. ⁸They are to construct a sanctuary for Me so that I may dwell in their midst. ⁹According to all that I show you — the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings — so you shall make it. ¹⁰They shall make an ark of acacia wood. It shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹You shall overlay it with pure gold — inside and outside you shall overlay it — and you shall make a molding of gold around it. ¹²You shall cast four gold rings for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on one side and two rings on the other. ¹³You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴You shall put the poles through the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark by them. ¹⁵The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be removed from it. ¹⁶You shall put into the ark the Testimony that I shall give you. ¹⁷You shall make an atonement cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁸You shall make two cherubim of gold. You shall make them of hammered work at the two ends of the atonement cover. ¹⁹Make one cherub at one end and one cherub at the other end. Of one piece with the atonement cover you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. ²⁰The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the atonement cover with their wings, facing one another. The faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the atonement cover. ²¹You shall put the atonement cover on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you. ²²There I will meet with you, and from above the atonement cover, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the Testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will command you concerning the sons of Israel. ²³You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. ²⁴You shall overlay it with pure gold and make a molding of gold around it. ²⁵You shall make a rim around it a handbreadth wide, and a gold molding around the rim. ²⁶You shall make four gold rings for it and attach the rings to the four corners at its four legs. ²⁷The rings shall be close to the rim, as holders for the poles to carry the table. ²⁸You shall make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with them. ²⁹You shall make its plates, its dishes, its pitchers, and its bowls for pouring drink offerings. You shall make them of pure gold. ³⁰You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before Me at all times. ³¹You shall

make a lampstand of pure gold. The lampstand shall be made of hammered work — its base, its stem, its cups, its buds, and its blossoms shall be of one piece with it. ³²Six branches shall extend from its sides — three branches from one side and three branches from the other. ³³Three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a bud and a blossom, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with a bud and a blossom, on the other branch — so for all six branches extending from the lampstand. ³⁴On the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, with their buds and blossoms. ³⁵A bud shall be under each pair of branches extending from it — a bud under the first pair, a bud under the second pair, and a bud under the third pair — for the six branches extending from the lampstand. ³⁶Their buds and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it a single piece of hammered work of pure gold. ³⁷You shall make seven lamps for it, and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the area in front of it. ³⁸Its tongs and its trays shall be of pure gold. ³⁹It shall be made, with all these utensils, from a talent of pure gold. ⁴⁰See that you make them according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The tabernacle instructions begin. God initiates — 'The LORD spoke to Moses' — maintaining the pattern that all worship structures originate in divine command, not human invention.
2. 'A contribution' (terumah) — from the verb rum ('to lift up, to raise'). A terumah is something lifted up from one's possessions and given to God. The offering is voluntary: 'from every person whose heart moves him' (kol-ish asher yiddevenu libbo). The tabernacle is funded by willing hearts, not compulsory taxation.
3. The materials list begins with the most precious metals and descends: gold, silver, bronze. The materials that Israel took from Egypt (12:35-36) now find their purpose — what was plundered from the oppressor becomes the raw material for God's dwelling.
4. The dyed yarns — blue (tekhelet), purple (argaman), scarlet (tola'at shani) — are luxury materials associated with royalty. The tabernacle is a royal residence: God is King, and His dwelling is furnished accordingly.
5. Rams' skins, fine leather (tachash — the exact animal is unknown; proposals include dugong, dolphin, or fine goatskin), and acacia wood (atsei shittim) — desert-available materials. The tabernacle is built from what the wilderness provides, supplemented by what Egypt supplied.
6. Oil for the lamp (the menorah, vv.31-40) and spices for anointing oil and incense. Light and fragrance — the tabernacle engages sight and smell as well as the hearing that dominated Sinai.
7. Precious stones for the priestly vestments (detailed in ch28). The contribution encompasses the full range of materials: metals, textiles, wood, oils, spices, and gems.
8. 'Let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them' (ve'asu li miqdash veshakhanti betokham) — one of the most important verses in Exodus. The word miqdash ('sanctuary') is from qadosh ('holy'): a holy place, a place set apart for God. The verb shakhanti ('I may dwell') is from shakan — the root of Shekhinah. God's stated purpose for the tabernacle is not sacrifice, ceremony, or religion but dwelling: I want to live among you. The destination of the exodus is not merely the promised land but God's presence.
9. 'The pattern' (tavnit) — the tabernacle is not designed by human creativity but built according to a heavenly blueprint. The word tavnit means 'pattern, model, plan.' The earthly sanctuary replicates a heavenly reality (cf. Hebrews 8:5). The instruction 'so you shall make it' (ken ta'asu) demands exact compliance with the revealed design.
10. The ark (aron) is the first item described because it is the most sacred. It is a wooden chest (approximately 3.75 x 2.25 x 2.25 feet) that will contain the covenant tablets. The word aron is different from tevah (Noah's ark / Moses's basket) — it means a chest or box.
11. Gold inside and outside — the ark is entirely gold-covered. The internal gold means that even what is invisible (the interior, which only God sees) is as precious as the exterior. Nothing in God's presence is merely decorative; everything is substantial.
12. Four rings for carrying poles ensure the ark can be transported without being touched directly. The holiness of the ark requires mediated handling — even the priests who carry it do not touch its surface.
13. Acacia wood overlaid with gold — strength (wood) clothed in glory (gold). The combination appears throughout the tabernacle furniture.
14. The poles go through the rings for carrying. The ark is designed for movement: it travels with Israel through the wilderness. God's dwelling is not a fixed temple but a portable presence.
15. 'The poles shall not be removed' (lo yasuru mimmennu) — the ark is always ready to move. Even when stationary, the carrying poles remain in place. God's presence is perpetually mobile — He goes where His people go.
16. 'The Testimony' (ha'edut) — the stone tablets of the covenant, which will be written by God's own finger (31:18). The ark is, at its core, a container for God's words. The most sacred object in Israel holds text.

17. 'An atonement cover' (kapporet) — from the root kaphar ('to cover, to atone'). Traditionally rendered 'mercy seat.' The kapporet is the gold lid of the ark, the place where atonement is enacted on Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16:14-15). It is both furniture (a lid) and theology (the place of covering/atonement). This is the first appearance of the kippur register term in a tabernacle context.
18. Two cherubim (keruvim) — angelic figures, not the chubby infants of Renaissance art but powerful guardian beings associated with God's throne (cf. Genesis 3:24; Ezekiel 1, 10; Psalm 80:1). They are beaten from the same piece of gold as the kapporet — not attached but integral to the atonement cover.
19. The cherubim and the kapporet are 'one piece' (miqqashah) — hammered from a single mass of gold. The unity of the design means the guardians of God's throne and the place of atonement are inseparable. Where atonement happens, God's throne-guardians are present.
20. Wings outstretched, facing each other, looking down at the kapporet — the cherubim create a canopy over the atonement cover. Between their wings, above the kapporet, is where God's presence will be manifest (v22). The space between the cherubim is the most sacred space in all of Israel.
21. The structure is complete: Testimony inside the ark, kapporet on top, cherubim above. The layers move from written word (tablets) to atoning cover (kapporet) to divine presence (between the cherubim). Word, atonement, and presence are architecturally unified.
22. 'There I will meet with you' (venoadti lekha sham) — the verb ya'ad ('to meet, to appoint') is the root of mo'ed ('meeting, appointed time'). The space above the kapporet, between the cherubim, is the appointed meeting place between God and Moses. God's communication with Israel happens at the point of atonement. The word and the covering are inseparable: God speaks from the place where sin is covered.
23. The table of acacia wood — the second piece of tabernacle furniture. It holds the 'bread of the Presence' (lechem hapanim, v30). The table represents God's provision and fellowship.
24. Gold overlay, gold molding — the same construction pattern as the ark. Everything in the tabernacle's interior is gold: the furnishings match the sanctuary's holy character.
25. A rim (misgeret) and molding secure the objects on the table surface. The practical details ensure that the sacred bread is not displaced during transport.
26. Four rings, as with the ark — the table is also portable. Every piece of tabernacle furniture is designed for movement.
27. Poles near the rim for carrying — the engineering details are precise. The tabernacle is mobile worship architecture: every piece can be disassembled, carried, and reassembled.
28. Acacia and gold poles — the carrying system is consistent across all major furnishings.
29. Plates, dishes, pitchers, bowls — the tableware for the bread of the Presence and the drink offerings. All pure gold. The table is fully set for the divine meal.
30. 'The bread of the Presence' (lechem hapanim) — literally 'bread of the face' or 'face bread.' Twelve loaves (Leviticus 24:5-6), one for each tribe, set before God's face at all times. The bread represents Israel's constant presence before God and God's constant provision for Israel. The table is never empty — the relationship is perpetual.
31. The lampstand (menorah) — the third major piece. Pure gold, hammered from a single piece (miqqashah, as with the cherubim). The menorah provides light in the tabernacle's interior — without it, the sanctuary is dark. Light in God's dwelling comes from a source God designed.
32. Six branches extend from a central stem — three on each side, plus the central shaft, making seven lights total. The number seven signals completeness (as in creation's seven days). The menorah is a tree of light.
33. Almond blossom design (meshukadim) — the almond (shaqed) is the first tree to bloom in spring, and its name puns with shoqed ('watching, wakeful'). The menorah's design evokes both natural beauty and divine vigilance. Jeremiah 1:11-12 will play on this same pun.
34. The central stem has four cups — more than the branches, making it visually dominant. The design radiates from the center outward.
35. Buds at each branching point integrate the branches into the central structure. The whole is organic — a single golden tree with seven flowering tops.
36. 'A single piece of hammered work' (miqqashah achat) — no soldering, no assembly. The entire menorah is beaten from one talent of gold. The unity of the design reflects the unity of the God it serves.
37. Seven lamps illuminate the space 'in front of it' (al-ever panehah) — the menorah faces the table of showbread across the sanctuary. Light falls on the bread of the Presence. Provision is visible in the light God provides.
38. Tongs and trays of pure gold — the tools for maintaining the lamps are as sacred as the lampstand itself. Nothing in the tabernacle is mundane.
39. One talent of gold (approximately 75 pounds / 34 kilograms) for the entire menorah and its utensils. The weight is enormous, the craftsmanship extraordinary.
40. 'According to the pattern shown you on the mountain' (betavnitam asher-attah mor'eh bahar) — the chapter closes as it began (v9): the earthly tabernacle must replicate the heavenly design. Human creativity serves divine specification. The final word is the mountain — Sinai remains the origin point of everything Israel builds.

26

Summary: *God gives detailed instructions for the tabernacle's curtains, frames, and crossbars. The innermost layer features finely woven linen with cherubim in blue, purple, and scarlet. Goat-hair curtains form the outer tent. Gold-plated acacia frames create the structure, joined by silver bases.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The tabernacle (mishkan, from shakan, 'to dwell') is a portable dwelling — theology in textile. The cherubim woven into the innermost curtains mirror the cherubim on the mercy seat, so that guardian figures surround God's space from every direction. The modularity of the design (two sets of five curtains, coupled by gold clasps, v6) reveals a structure built for assembly, disassembly, and transport — a community on the move carries God's presence with them. The veil (parokhet, v31) separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, creating the graduated holiness that defines tabernacle theology.*

Translation Friction: *The technical textile vocabulary posed consistent challenges. The Hebrew tekhelet (blue/violet), argaman (purple), and tola'at shani (scarlet) are dye terms with specific ancient referents; we retained the color terms without specifying the dyeing agents. The dimensions in cubits (approximately 18 inches each) we preserved in the Hebrew measurement, adding approximate modern equivalents in notes. The word qerashim ('frames,' v15) was traditionally rendered 'boards,' but recent scholarship favors open frameworks; we chose 'frames.'*

Connections: *The veil torn at Christ's death (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38) is this parokhet. The tabernacle as portable dwelling anticipates the temple of 1 Kings 6-8 and ultimately the incarnation (John 1:14, where skenoo, 'tabernacled,' echoes mishkan). The cherubim on the curtains connect to the garden guardians of Genesis 3:24.*

¹"You shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim skillfully worked into them. ²The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. All the curtains shall be the same size. ³Five curtains shall be joined to one another, and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another. ⁴You shall make loops of blue yarn on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set, and likewise on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set. ⁵You shall make fifty loops on the one curtain, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain in the second set, the loops being opposite one another. ⁶You shall make fifty clasps of gold and join the curtains to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle forms a single unit. ⁷"You shall make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle. You shall make eleven curtains. ⁸The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits. The eleven curtains shall be the same size. ⁹You shall join five curtains by themselves and six curtains by themselves, and you shall fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the tent. ¹⁰You shall make fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain in the other set. ¹¹You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, put the clasps into the loops, and join the tent together so that it forms a single unit. ¹²The part that hangs over the back of the tabernacle — the extra half-curtain — shall hang over the back. ¹³The extra cubit on each side in the length of the tent curtains shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and on that side, to cover it. ¹⁴You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of fine leather on top of that. ¹⁵"You shall make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. ¹⁶Each frame shall be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ¹⁷Each frame shall have two tenons joined to one another. You shall make all the frames of the tabernacle this way. ¹⁸You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side. ¹⁹You shall make forty bases of silver under the twenty frames — two bases under each frame for its two tenons. ²⁰For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, twenty frames, ²¹with their forty bases of silver — two bases under each frame. ²²For the back of the tabernacle, on the west side, you shall make six frames. ²³You shall make two frames for the corners of the tabernacle at the back. ²⁴They shall be joined at the bottom and coupled at the top in a single ring. Both of them shall be this way; they shall form the two corners. ²⁵There shall be eight frames with their bases of silver — sixteen bases, two bases under each frame. ²⁶"You shall make bars of acacia wood: five for the frames on one side of the tabernacle, ²⁷five bars for the frames on the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the

frames on the back side of the tabernacle, to the west. ²⁸The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall run from end to end. ²⁹You shall overlay the frames with gold and make their rings of gold as holders for the bars, and you shall overlay the bars with gold. ³⁰You shall set up the tabernacle according to the plan that was shown you on the mountain. ³¹"You shall make a veil of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim skillfully worked into it. ³²You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, with hooks of gold, on four bases of silver. ³³You shall hang the veil from the clasps, and you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there behind the veil. The veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. ³⁴You shall put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. ³⁵You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table. You shall place the table on the north side. ³⁶"You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, the work of an embroiderer. ³⁷You shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia and overlay them with gold. Their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The tabernacle (*mishkan*, from *shakan*, 'to dwell') is God's portable dwelling place. The innermost layer — finely woven linen with cherubim — creates a sacred canopy. The cherubim woven into the curtains echo the cherubim on the *kapporet* (25:18-20): the guardian figures surround God's space from every direction.
2. Each curtain is approximately 42 x 6 feet. The uniformity ('all the same size') reflects the ordered perfection of sacred space — nothing in God's dwelling is haphazard or improvised.
3. Two sets of five curtains, joined together, create two large panels that will be coupled to form the ceiling. The construction method is modular — designed for assembly, disassembly, and transport.
4. Blue yarn loops — the color *tekhelet* (blue/violet) is associated with royalty and divinity throughout the Torah. Even the functional connectors reflect the sacred nature of the space.
5. Fifty loops on each panel, precisely aligned ('opposite one another'). The engineering detail ensures exact fit — sacred architecture demands precision.
6. Gold clasps (*qarssei zahav*) join the two halves into 'a single unit' (*echad*). The word *echad* ('one') echoes the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4): as God is one, His dwelling is one. The tabernacle's unity reflects its builder's nature.
7. The goats' hair tent (*ohel*) covers the linen tabernacle (*mishkan*). The outer layer protects the inner — the practical shields the sacred. Goats' hair is waterproof and durable: functional material serving holy purposes.
8. Slightly larger curtains (30 x 6 feet vs 28 x 6) to provide overhang and complete coverage of the inner curtains beneath.
9. The sixth curtain is doubled at the front — extra material providing a visible entrance flap. The tabernacle's approach is marked by the fold of its covering.
10. Fifty loops, mirroring the inner curtain construction. The outer tent replicates the inner pattern — the layers correspond.
11. Bronze clasps (*qarssei nechoshet*) for the outer tent — less precious than the gold of the inner curtains. Materials decrease in value from inside out: gold (holiest), then bronze (protective outer layer). Proximity to God determines material worth.
12. The extra half-curtain hangs over the back — practical covering with aesthetic consequence. The rear of the tabernacle is draped, not exposed.
13. The overhang on each side protects the linen curtains from exposure. The engineering accounts for weather and wear — sacred space is also practical space.
14. Two additional outer coverings: rams' skins dyed red and *tachash* (fine leather). Four layers total: linen, goats' hair, rams' skins, leather. Each layer adds protection; the outermost is the most weather-resistant.
15. Upright frames (*qerashim*) of acacia wood form the tabernacle's structural skeleton. Acacia (*shittah*) is the hardest wood available in the Sinai wilderness — dense, durable, and insect-resistant.
16. Each frame is approximately 15 x 2.25 feet. The height (10 cubits) matches the height of the curtains, creating a precise fit between structure and covering.
17. Tenons (*yadot*, literally 'hands') are projections that fit into sockets. The joinery is mortise-and-tenon — each frame locks into its base with two connection points for stability.
18. Twenty frames on the south side — the tabernacle's longer walls. The total south-wall length is approximately 45 feet (20 frames x 1.5 cubits each).
19. Silver bases (*adnei kesef*) — each frame sits in two silver sockets. Forty bases for twenty frames. The silver came from the census atonement money (30:11-16; 38:25-28), making the tabernacle's foundation literally built on atonement.

20. The north side mirrors the south: twenty frames, identical construction. The bilateral symmetry creates a balanced, ordered space.
21. Forty silver bases on the north, matching the south. The repetition ensures structural consistency — both walls bear equal load.
22. Six frames for the western back wall — the narrow end. The tabernacle opens to the east, facing the sunrise. The Most Holy Place is at the western end, the deepest interior.
23. Two additional corner frames solve the engineering challenge of joining the back wall to the side walls at right angles.
24. The corner frames are joined top and bottom, creating rigid corners that hold the structure square. The detail 'coupled at the top in a single ring' describes a metal fitting that locks the corner.
25. Eight frames on the back (six plus two corners), sixteen silver bases. The total frame count: $20 + 20 + 8 = 48$ frames on 96 silver bases.
26. Cross-bars (berichim) of acacia wood brace the frames horizontally. Five bars per wall provide lateral stability — without them, the upright frames would sway.
27. Five bars on each of the three walled sides. The bar system creates a rigid box structure that can withstand desert winds.
28. The middle bar runs the entire length of the wall — a single continuous timber that unifies the frame system. This is the structural spine of each wall.
29. Gold overlay on frames and bars — even the structural members are covered in gold. The entire interior surface is golden. Nothing exposed to view inside the tabernacle is bare wood.
30. 'According to the plan shown you on the mountain' (kemishpato asher hor'eta bahar) — the chapter closes with the same insistence on heavenly pattern that opened the tabernacle instructions (25:9, 40). Human builders follow divine design.
31. The veil (parokhet) separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Its materials — blue, purple, scarlet, fine linen — match the inner curtains. Cherubim are woven into it, as they were on the curtains and fashioned on the kapporet. The cherubim guard every threshold of God's presence.
32. Four gold-overlaid pillars support the veil. Silver bases, gold hooks — the materials match the space's holiness. The veil hangs between the accessible and the inaccessible.
33. The veil's function is separation: 'it shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place' (vehivdilah happarokhet lakhem bein haqqodesh uvein qodesh haqqodashim). The word hivdilah ('separate, divide') is the same verb God used to separate light from darkness at creation (Genesis 1:4). The veil is a creation-boundary: it divides realms.
34. The kapporet goes on the ark, inside the Most Holy Place — the innermost point of the tabernacle, behind the veil, accessible only to the high priest once a year on Yom Kippur.
35. The table (north) and lampstand (south) are positioned in the Holy Place, outside the veil. The bread of the Presence faces the light of the menorah across the room — provision and illumination in the space where priests serve daily.
36. The entrance screen (masakh) is less elaborate than the inner veil — embroidered, not woven with cherubim. The distinction marks the difference between the entrance to the Holy Place and the entrance to the Most Holy Place.
37. Five bronze-based pillars support the entrance screen. Bronze bases (vs silver for the veil pillars) reflect the descending holiness gradient from inside out: Most Holy (gold/silver) Holy (silver/bronze) courtyard (bronze).

27

Summary: God gives instructions for the bronze altar of burnt offering — the first object encountered in the courtyard — along with its utensils, the courtyard enclosure of linen hangings on bronze pillars, and the perpetual lamp fueled by pure olive oil.

What Makes This Remarkable: The altar's horns (qarnot) project from the four corners as a single piece with the altar — blood is applied to these horns in sacrificial rituals, and they serve as a place of sanctuary (1 Kings 1:50). The courtyard material hierarchy creates a holiness gradient: bronze in the courtyard, silver at the structure's base, gold in the interior. The perpetual lamp (ner tamid, v20) burns 'from evening to morning' — light never ceases in the space where God dwells. Israel's first communal obligation is to supply oil for this unending flame.

Translation Friction: We rendered mizbach ha'olah as 'altar of burnt offering' rather than simply 'altar,' to distinguish it from the incense altar introduced in chapter 30. The bronze (nechoshet) overlay reflects the courtyard's position in the holiness gradient — not gold (interior) but the appropriate metal for the space of sacrifice. The phrase ner tamid ('perpetual lamp') we rendered as such, noting that 'perpetual' (tamid) means continually maintained, not miraculously self-sustaining.

Connections: The altar's design anticipates Solomon's much larger bronze altar (2 Chronicles 4:1). The horns of the altar appear in 1 Kings 1:50-51 and Psalm 118:27. The perpetual lamp connects to the seven-branched lampstand of 25:31-40 and anticipates the 'lamp of God' in Samuel's temple (1 Samuel 3:3). The courtyard enclosure establishes the boundary between sacred and common space.

¹You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide — the altar shall be square — and three cubits high. ²You shall make horns for it on its four corners. Its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. ³You shall make pots for removing its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and fire pans. You shall make all its utensils of bronze. ⁴You shall make for it a grating, a network of bronze, and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. ⁵You shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net extends halfway down the altar. ⁶You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze. ⁷The poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles are on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. ⁸You shall make it hollow, with boards. As it was shown to you on the mountain, so shall it be made. ⁹You shall make the courtyard of the tabernacle. On the south side the courtyard shall have hangings of finely twisted linen, a hundred cubits long on that side. ¹⁰Its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze. The hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver. ¹¹Likewise along the north side there shall be hangings a hundred cubits long, with twenty pillars and twenty bronze bases. The hooks and bands of the pillars shall be of silver. ¹²The width of the courtyard on the west side shall have hangings of fifty cubits, with ten pillars and ten bases. ¹³The width of the courtyard on the east side shall be fifty cubits. ¹⁴The hangings on one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits, with three pillars and three bases. ¹⁵On the other side shall be hangings of fifteen cubits, with three pillars and three bases. ¹⁶For the gate of the courtyard there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, the work of an embroiderer, with four pillars and four bases. ¹⁷All the pillars around the courtyard shall be banded with silver. Their hooks shall be of silver and their bases of bronze. ¹⁸The length of the courtyard shall be a hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height five cubits, with hangings of finely twisted linen and bases of bronze. ¹⁹All the utensils of the tabernacle used in all its service, and all its tent pegs, and all the tent pegs of the courtyard, shall be of bronze. ²⁰"You shall command the sons of Israel to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep a lamp burning continually. ²¹In the tent of meeting, outside the veil that is before the Testimony, Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be an eternal statute throughout their generations on behalf of the sons of Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The bronze altar (mizbach hanechoshet) is the first object encountered upon entering the courtyard — sacrifice is the gateway to God's presence. Five cubits square (approximately 7.5 x 7.5 feet) and three cubits high (approximately 4.5 feet), it is the largest piece of tabernacle furniture.
2. 'Horns on its four corners' (qarnot al arba pinnotav) — the horns are projections at each corner, integral to the altar ('of one piece with it'). Blood is applied to these horns during sacrificial rituals (Leviticus 4:7, 18, 25, 30). A person could grasp the horns for sanctuary (1 Kings 1:50). The horn symbolizes power and refuge.
3. The altar's utensils are all bronze — pots, shovels, basins, forks, fire pans. The bronze material reflects the courtyard's position in the holiness gradient: not gold (interior), not silver (structural), but bronze (sacrificial/external).
4. The bronze grating sits inside the altar, allowing air circulation for the fire and drainage for the blood. The engineering serves the sacrificial function — nothing in the design is merely decorative.
5. The net extends halfway down — the upper portion holds the fire and sacrifice, the lower portion provides structural support and airflow.
6. Carrying poles of acacia and bronze — the altar, like the ark, table, and lampstand, is portable. Every piece of sacred furniture moves with Israel.
7. Poles through rings on two sides — the carrying system is consistent across all tabernacle pieces. The altar is always ready to travel.
8. 'Hollow, with boards' — the altar is not solid but a frame structure, likely filled with earth at each campsite (cf. 20:24, 'an altar of earth you shall make for Me'). The heavenly pattern shown on the mountain governs the construction.
9. The courtyard (chatser) is the outermost sacred zone — 100 x 50 cubits (approximately 150 x 75 feet). Linen hangings create walls that separate sacred space from the surrounding camp. The enclosure is visible but not transparent: the linen creates a boundary without a barrier to sight.
10. Twenty pillars on the south side with bronze bases and silver hooks — the material gradient continues: bronze at ground level, silver at attachment points. The courtyard is less holy than the sanctuary interior but holier than the camp beyond.

11. The north side mirrors the south — bilateral symmetry governs the entire tabernacle complex.
12. The west side (back of the tabernacle) is fifty cubits — half the length of the sides. The courtyard is twice as long as it is wide, creating a rectangular processional space leading toward the sanctuary.
13. The east side (front, entrance side) is also fifty cubits wide but divided by the gate.
14. Fifteen cubits of hangings on one side of the gate — the entrance is centered on the east wall.
15. Fifteen cubits on the other side — the gate is flanked symmetrically. The entrance is twenty cubits wide (v16), leaving fifteen cubits of hanging on each side.
16. The gate screen is the courtyard's entrance — embroidered (not woven with cherubim like the inner veil). Blue, purple, scarlet, and linen: the same four materials used throughout the tabernacle, maintaining visual continuity from outer entrance to inner sanctuary.
17. Silver bands and hooks throughout — silver is the connecting material that holds the courtyard together, just as silver bases hold the tabernacle frames.
18. The complete dimensions are stated: 100 x 50 x 5 cubits. The five-cubit height of the hangings is high enough to block ground-level view but low enough that the tabernacle structure rises above it, visible from the camp.
19. All utensils and tent pegs are bronze. The inventory ensures completeness — nothing is overlooked. The pegs anchor the entire structure against wind.
20. 'Clear oil of pressed olives' (shemen zayit zakh) — the finest quality olive oil, cold-pressed without heat to ensure clarity. The eternal light (ner tamid) in the tabernacle burns the best fuel available. God's light is sustained by the people's contribution.
21. 'From evening to morning' — the lamp burns through the night, ensuring the tabernacle is never in darkness. Aaron and his sons tend it — priestly service includes the maintenance of sacred light. 'An eternal statute' (chuqqat olam) — the lamp-tending obligation is perpetual, binding across all generations.

28

Summary: *God commands the making of sacred garments for Aaron — the ephod, breastpiece with twelve stones for the twelve tribes, robe, turban, and gold plate inscribed 'Holy to the LORD.' The garments are made 'for glory and for splendor' by Spirit-filled artisans.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The purpose statement lekhavod uletif'aret ('for glory and for splendor,' v2) connects the priestly vestments to God's own kavod — the priest dressed in these garments carries a visible representation of divine glory. The breastpiece (choshen) bears twelve stones engraved with tribal names, so that Aaron carries all Israel on his heart when he enters God's presence (v29). The gold plate inscription qodesh laYHWH ('Holy to the LORD,' v36) on the turban makes the high priest a walking declaration of consecration.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase chakhemei-lev ('wise of heart,' v3) we rendered as 'skilled artisans,' since the Hebrew concept of 'heart-wisdom' means practical expertise, not merely emotional intelligence. The twelve gemstones on the breastpiece (vv17-20) include several terms whose identification is uncertain in modern mineralogy; we followed traditional identifications while noting scholarly uncertainty. The Urim and Thummim (v30) we left untranslated, as their exact nature and function remain debated — they appear to be oracular instruments for discerning God's will.*

Connections: *The breastpiece bearing tribal names anticipates the intercessory function of the high priest developed in Hebrews 7-9. The 'Holy to the LORD' inscription connects to Zechariah 14:20, where even horse bells bear the inscription. The priestly garments' beauty anticipates the temple splendor of 1 Kings 6 and the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21.*

¹"Bring your brother Aaron near to you, along with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve Me as priests — Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. ²You shall make sacred garments for your brother Aaron — for glory and for splendor. ³Speak to all the skilled artisans whom I have filled with a spirit of wisdom, and they shall make Aaron's garments to consecrate him to serve Me as priest. ⁴These are the garments they shall make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash. They shall make sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve Me as

priests. ⁵They shall use gold, blue yarn, purple yarn, scarlet yarn, and fine linen. ⁶They shall make the ephod of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen — the work of a skilled designer. ⁷It shall have two shoulder straps attached at its two edges, joining it together. ⁸The decorative waistband on it shall be of the same workmanship and materials — gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. ⁹Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel. ¹⁰Six of their names on one stone, and the remaining six names on the other stone, in birth order. ¹¹With the skill of a gem-cutter, engrave the two stones like seal engravings with the names of the sons of Israel. Mount them in gold filigree settings. ¹²Set the two stones on the shoulder straps of the ephod as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders as a memorial. ¹³Make gold filigree settings, ¹⁴and two chains of pure gold, braided like cords. Attach the braided chains to the settings. ¹⁵You shall make a breastpiece of decision — skilled designer's work, like the ephod. Make it of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. ¹⁶It shall be square and folded double — a span long and a span wide. ¹⁷Mount on it a setting of stones — four rows of stones. The first row: a ruby, a topaz, and an emerald. ¹⁸The second row: a turquoise, a lapis lazuli, and a moonstone. ¹⁹The third row: a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst. ²⁰The fourth row: a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be mounted in gold filigree settings. ²¹The stones shall correspond to the names of the sons of Israel — twelve in all, according to their names. Each shall be engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes. ²²For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, corded work. ²³Make two gold rings for the breastpiece and attach them to its two upper corners. ²⁴Put the two gold braided chains through the two rings at the corners of the breastpiece. ²⁵Attach the other two ends of the braided chains to the two filigree settings on the front of the ephod's shoulder straps. ²⁶Make two more gold rings and place them on the two lower corners of the breastpiece, on its inner edge facing the ephod. ²⁷Make two more gold rings and attach them to the front of the ephod's two shoulder straps, at the lower part near the seam, just above the ephod's waistband. ²⁸The breastpiece shall be bound by its rings to the ephod's rings with a blue cord, keeping it above the ephod's waistband so that the breastpiece does not come loose from the ephod. ²⁹Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of decision over his heart when he enters the holy place — as a perpetual memorial before the LORD. ³⁰Place into the breastpiece of decision the Urim and the Thummim. They shall be over Aaron's heart when he comes before the LORD, and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the Israelites over his heart before the LORD at all times. ³¹Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue yarn. ³²It shall have an opening for the head in the center, with a woven binding around the opening — like the collar of a coat of mail — so that it does not tear. ³³On its hem make pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn all around the hem, with gold bells between them all around — ³⁴a gold bell and a pomegranate, a gold bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe. ³⁵Aaron shall wear it when he serves, so that its sound is heard when he enters the holy place before the LORD and when he comes out — so that he does not die. ³⁶Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like a seal engraving: HOLY TO THE LORD. ³⁷Fasten it to a blue cord so it stays on the turban — on the front of the turban it shall be. ³⁸It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear the guilt connected with the sacred offerings that the Israelites consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall always be on his forehead, so that they may be accepted before the LORD. ³⁹Weave the tunic in a checkered pattern of fine linen. Make the turban of fine linen and the sash with embroidered work. ⁴⁰For Aaron's sons make tunics, sashes, and caps — for glory and for splendor. ⁴¹Clothe your brother Aaron and his sons in these garments. Anoint them, ordain them, and consecrate them, so they may serve Me as priests. ⁴²Make linen undergarments for them to cover their bare flesh, reaching from the waist to the thighs. ⁴³They shall be on Aaron and his sons when they enter the tent of meeting or approach the altar to serve in the holy place, so that they do not incur guilt and die. This is a permanent statute for him and his descendants after him."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The priestly garment instructions begin with the appointment of the priesthood itself. Five men are named: Aaron and his four sons. The verb *haqrev* ('bring near,' from q-r-b — the offering root) frames the priests' selection as a sacred presentation. All four sons are listed, though Nadab and Abihu will die in Leviticus 10 for offering unauthorized fire. The phrase *lekhahano-li* ('to serve Me as priests,' literally 'to priest for Me') defines the priesthood as personal service to God.

2. The purpose of the priestly garments: lekhhavod uletifaret ('for glory and for splendor'). The word kavod ('glory, weight, honor') — the register term — connects the priestly vestments to God's own glory. The priest dressed in these garments carries a visible representation of divine kavod. The word tif'eret ('splendor, beauty, adornment') adds aesthetic magnificence to theological weight. The garments are not merely functional but beautiful — worship engages the visual sense.
3. The artisans are chakhemei-lev ('wise of heart' — skilled craftsmen) whom God has filled with ruach chokhmah ('spirit of wisdom'). As with Bezalel (31:3), artistic skill is a divine endowment. The garments' purpose: leqaddesho ('to consecrate him') — the clothing itself effects consecration. Wearing the garments transforms Aaron from an ordinary Israelite into the high priest. The garments do not merely identify the priest; they create the priestly status.
4. The six-piece high priestly ensemble: choshen ('breastpiece' — the gem-studded decision plate), efod ('ephod' — an ornate outer vest), me'il ('robe' — the blue garment worn under the ephod), ketonet tashbets ('checkered tunic' — a woven linen undergarment), mitsnefet ('turban' — the head covering bearing the golden plate), and avnet ('sash' — the waistband). Aaron's sons receive a simpler four-piece set (v40). The high priest wears more because he bears more — his garments carry the names of all twelve tribes.
5. Five materials — the same palette as the tabernacle itself (25:3-4): zahav ('gold'), tekhelet ('blue' — a costly dye from the murex snail), argaman ('purple' — an even more expensive murex dye), tola'at shani ('scarlet' — crimson dye from an insect), and shesh ('fine linen' — Egyptian-quality woven linen). The priest wears the tabernacle's colors — he is a walking extension of the sacred space. When he enters the tent, his garments match its fabric.
6. The efod — the signature garment of the high priest — is described first. It is woven from all five materials: gold thread interwoven with the four colored yarns and linen. Ma'aseh choshev ('the work of a skilled designer/thinker') — the verb chashav means 'to think, to devise' (the same root as 31:4), emphasizing that the ephod requires not just weaving skill but creative design intelligence.
7. The ephod's construction: two shoulder straps (khetafot) connect the front and back panels at the shoulders. The garment functions as a sacred vest or apron, held in place by the shoulder pieces and the sash. The shoulder straps will bear the onyx stones engraved with the tribal names (v9-12).
8. The cheshev afuddato ('the band/waistband of the ephod') secures the garment at the waist. It is made from the same five materials (mimmennu yihyeh — 'it shall be of it'), ensuring visual and material unity between the ephod body and its fastening. The priestly garments are an integrated whole — no element is mismatched.
9. Two avnei-shoham ('onyx stones') will carry the names of the twelve tribes — six names on each stone (v10). The engraving (pittachta — 'you shall engrave/open') is permanent: the names are cut into the stone, not painted or attached. The high priest carries Israel's identity physically on his body. Every time he enters the sanctuary, twelve names go with him.
10. The names follow ketoldotam ('according to their generations/birth order') — the sequence of Jacob's sons by birth, not by tribal importance. Birth order rather than political ranking ensures that the representation is familial, not hierarchical. All twelve tribes are equally present before God — no tribe's name is larger, higher, or more prominent than another's.
11. The engraving quality: ma'aseh charash even ('the work of a stone-craftsman') using pituchei chotam ('seal engravings') — the same technique used to cut official seals. The names of Israel's tribes are engraved with the precision of royal insignia. The mishbetsot zahav ('gold filigree settings') secure the stones in ornate golden frames on the shoulder straps. The technical precision demanded reflects the theological weight of what the stones represent.
12. The stones' function: avnei zikkharon livnei Yisra'el ('stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel'). The word zikkharon ('memorial, remembrance') — the same word used for the grain offering's azkarah (Lev 2:2) — triggers divine attention. When Aaron enters God's presence wearing these stones, God sees Israel's names. Venasa Aharon et-shemotam lifnei YHWH ('Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD') — the priest carries the nation. His shoulders literally support the weight of Israel's identity before God. The verb nasa ('to bear, to carry') is the same word used for bearing sin — the priest bears both names and guilt.
13. Gold settings for the shoulder stones — the technical instruction continues the detailed craftsmanship specifications.
14. Pure gold chains (sharshot zahav tahor) connect the shoulder stone settings to the breastpiece (v22-25). The chains are ma'aseh avot ('corded/braided work') — twisted gold rope, combining strength with beauty. These chains form the visible link between the shoulder stones (bearing tribal names) and the breastpiece (bearing twelve more stones with tribal names).
15. The choshen mishpat ('breastpiece of judgment/decision') is the high priest's most distinctive garment element. The word mishpat here means 'judgment, decision' — this is the plate that holds the Urim and Thummim (v30), the oracular instruments used to discern God's will. The breastpiece is made from the same five materials as the ephod (kema'aseh efod — 'like the work of the ephod'), maintaining the unified aesthetic. It is not merely decorative but functional — it is the instrument through which God communicates decisions to Israel.
16. The breastpiece is ravua ('square'), kaful ('doubled/folded'), and one zeret ('span' — approximately 9 inches) in each direction. The doubled fabric creates a pocket for the Urim and Thummim (v30). The square shape — equal on all sides — symbolizes completeness and balance, appropriate for an instrument of divine judgment.
17. Four rows of three stones each (twelve total, one per tribe). The first row: odem ('ruby/carnelian' — red), pitdah ('topaz/chrysolite' — yellow-green), and bareqet ('emerald/beryl' — green). The exact identification of ancient gemstones is uncertain — the Hebrew terms may refer to different stones than the English names suggest. What is certain is the visual effect: twelve brilliant gemstones arranged in a grid on the high priest's chest, each

carrying a tribal name.

18. Second row: nofekh ('turquoise/malachite'), sappir ('lapis lazuli' — the biblical 'sapphire' is almost certainly lapis lazuli, a deep blue stone flecked with gold), and yahalom ('moonstone/diamond' — likely a clear or white stone). The KJV's 'diamond' for yahalom is probably incorrect since diamonds were not cut or polished in the ancient Near East.
19. Third row: leshem ('jacinth/amber'), shevo ('agate/banded stone'), and achlamah ('amethyst' — purple quartz). The stones progress through the color spectrum across the four rows, creating a visual tapestry of light and color on the priest's chest.
20. Fourth row: tarshish ('beryl/chrysolite' — possibly the stone of Tarshish, a golden-yellow gem), shoham ('onyx' — the same stone as the shoulder pieces, v9), and yashfeh ('jasper' — green or multicolored). All twelve stones are meshubatsim zahav ('set in gold filigree'). The completed breastpiece is a constellation of colored light framed in gold — each stone catching and refracting light as the priest moves.
21. Each stone bears one tribal name — ish al-shemo ('each with his name'). Twelve stones, twelve names, twelve tribes. The priest carries the entire nation on his chest — over his heart — when he enters God's presence. The engraving is pituchei chotam ('seal engravings'), the same technique as the shoulder stones (v11). The names are permanent, cut into gemstone. Israel's identity before God is literally etched in stone and worn against the high priest's beating heart.
22. The braided gold chains (from v14) attach the breastpiece to the ephod's shoulder settings — connecting the twelve stones on the chest to the two stones on the shoulders. The priest wears twenty-four instances of Israel's name: twelve on the breastpiece, twelve more (six per stone) on the shoulders.
23. Gold rings at the breastpiece's upper corners receive the chains from the shoulder settings. The attachment system (v22-28) secures the breastpiece firmly to the ephod — it must not shift or detach during priestly service. The mechanical details ensure that Israel's names stay in place over the priest's heart.
24. The chains thread through the rings, connecting breastpiece to ephod via the shoulder settings. The chain-ring-setting system creates a secure, flexible attachment that moves with the priest's body.
25. The chains run from the breastpiece corners upward to the shoulder settings — the same settings that hold the onyx stones bearing tribal names. The complete system: names on the shoulders (v12), names on the chest (v21), connected by golden chains. The priest's upper body is wrapped in Israel's identity.
26. Lower attachment rings on the breastpiece's inner edge — these connect to the ephod's waistband (v27-28) to prevent the breastpiece from swinging outward during movement.
27. These ephod-side rings correspond to the breastpiece's lower rings (v26). A blue cord will thread through both sets (v28), binding the breastpiece to the ephod at the waistband level. The mechanical description is extraordinarily precise — every ring, chain, and cord is specified to ensure the breastpiece stays securely positioned over the priest's heart.
28. The petil tekhelet ('blue cord') — the same expensive blue dye used in the tabernacle fabrics — ties the lower connections. The purpose: velo-yizzach hachoshen me'al ha'efod ('so the breastpiece does not shift from the ephod'). The verb zach ('shift, move away') — the breastpiece must not wander. Israel's names must stay fixed over the priest's heart. The blue cord is both functional (holding the breastpiece in place) and symbolic (the color of heaven securing the names of earth's covenant people).
29. The breastpiece's theological function stated explicitly: venasa Aharon et-shemot benei-Yisra'el bechoshen hammishpat al-libbo ('Aaron shall carry the names of Israel's sons in the breastpiece of decision over his heart'). Al-libbo — 'over his heart' — is the key phrase. The priest carries the nation against his heartbeat. Every pulse drives Israel's names into God's presence. Lezikkaron lifnei-YHWH tamid ('as a perpetual memorial before the LORD') — the memorial is permanent (tamid), not occasional. The priest never enters the sanctuary without Israel over his heart.
30. The Urim and Thummim (ha'urim vaha'tummim) are placed inside the breastpiece's pocket (created by the doubled fabric, v16). Their exact nature is unknown — possibly lots or stones used for binary oracular decisions (yes/no, go/stay, guilty/innocent). The names may derive from or ('light') and tam ('completeness/truth') — 'lights and perfections' or 'illumination and wholeness.' The phrase venasa Aharon et-mishpat benei-Yisra'el al-libbo ('Aaron shall carry the judgment of the Israelites over his heart') means the priest bears both Israel's identity (names, v29) and Israel's need for divine guidance (judgment, v30) simultaneously over his heart.
31. The me'il ('robe') worn under the ephod is kelil tekhelet ('entirely blue') — pure, undiluted blue. This is the garment visible beneath the ephod, creating a blue field behind the multicolored ephod and breastpiece. The tekhelet blue — extracted from the murex snail at enormous cost — was associated with royalty and heaven. The priest wears the color of the sky.
32. The neckline is reinforced: safah ('a binding/border') around the head opening prevents tearing. The comparison kefi tachra ('like the opening of a coat of mail') references military armor — the robe's neckline is as sturdy as a soldier's collar. The instruction lo yiqqarea ('it shall not tear') may carry ritual significance: a torn priestly garment would be a sign of mourning (prohibited during service, Lev 10:6) or of defect.
33. The robe's lower hem is decorated with alternating pomegranates (rimmonim — fabric ornaments in the three colored yarns) and gold bells (pa'amonei zahav). The pomegranate was a symbol of fertility and abundance throughout the ancient Near East. The alternating pattern — fruit, bell, fruit, bell — creates both visual beauty and audible announcement: the priest's movements produce sound.

34. The alternating pattern stated rhythmically: pa'amom zahav verimmon, pa'amom zahav verimmon — bell and fruit, bell and fruit. The repetition in the Hebrew text mirrors the physical pattern on the garment. The priest walking in the sanctuary creates a gentle chiming — his presence is heard before he is seen.
35. The bells' purpose is survival: venishma qolo ('its sound shall be heard') — the chiming announces the priest's approach and departure. Velo yamut ('so that he does not die') — silence could be fatal. The priest must be heard; unannounced entry into God's presence is lethal. The bells function as a kind of sacred doorbell — the priest does not sneak into God's presence but approaches with audible notice.
36. The tsits ('plate, flower, blossom') — a golden frontlet worn on the turban — bears the inscription qodesh laYHWH ('holy to the LORD'). This is the most visible element of the priestly wardrobe: a golden declaration across the forehead, visible to everyone who faces the priest. The priest's forehead proclaims what his entire person embodies: holiness dedicated to God. The word tsits also means 'blossom' — the golden plate may have been flower-shaped, creating a visual connection between the priest's forehead and the almond-blossom menorah.
37. The golden plate is attached by a petil tekhelet ('blue cord') to the mitsnefet ('turban'). The blue cord — the same color as the robe (v31) — holds the plate on the forehead's front (el-mul penei-hammitsnefet). The first thing anyone sees when facing the high priest is the gold inscription: HOLY TO THE LORD.
38. The golden plate's function: venasa Aharon et-avon haqqodashim ('Aaron shall bear the guilt of the holy things'). The priest absorbs the imperfections in Israel's offerings — if an offering was presented with some flaw or procedural error, the golden plate atones for it. The priest's forehead, declaring HOLY TO THE LORD, covers the gap between Israel's imperfect worship and God's perfect standard. Tamid ('always') — the plate is never removed during service. Leratson lahem lifnei YHWH ('for their acceptance before the LORD') — the priest's bearing of guilt makes the people acceptable.
39. Three garments specified: the ketonet shesh ('fine linen tunic' — woven in a tashbets/checkered pattern), the mitsnefet shesh ('fine linen turban'), and the avnet ma'aseh roqem ('sash of embroidered work'). These are the undergarments — less visible than the ephod and breastpiece but equally prescribed. Even the layers no one sees are made with care and precision.
40. Aaron's sons receive a simpler three-piece set: kuttonot ('tunics'), avnetim ('sashes'), and migba'ot ('caps' — not the full turban of the high priest). The same purpose phrase — lekhabod ulelif'aret ('for glory and for splendor') — applies to their garments as to Aaron's. Every priest, not only the high priest, wears sacred clothing. The garments of the ordinary priests are simpler but no less sacred.
41. Three acts of priestly installation: mashachta ('anoint' — with the sacred oil of 30:22-33), milleita et-yadam ('fill their hands' — ordination, literally 'fill the hand,' a gesture of commissioning), and qiddashta ('consecrate' — set apart for sacred service). The clothing comes first (vehilbashta), then anointing, ordination, and consecration. The sequence moves from external (garments) to internal (anointing) to functional (ordination) to status (consecration).
42. Mikhnesei-bad ('linen undergarments') cover besar ervah ('the flesh of nakedness') — from waist to thighs. The instruction is practical and theological: priests serving at an elevated altar must not expose themselves (cf. 20:26). The linen material (bad) is the priestly fabric — even undergarments are sacred textile. Modesty at the altar is a matter of holiness, not merely decorum.
43. The chapter closes with the garment requirement's ultimate sanction: velo-yise'u avon vametu ('so they do not bear guilt and die'). Improper priestly attire is not a dress code violation but a life-or-death matter. The sacred garments are the boundary between the priest's mortality and God's holiness — without them, the encounter is fatal. Chuqqat olam lo ulezar'o acharav ('a permanent statute for him and his descendants after him') — the garment regulations are perpetual, binding on every generation of priests. Chapter 28 has dressed the priest from head to toe: turban with golden plate, ephod with shoulder stones, breastpiece with twelve gems and Urim/Thummim, blue robe with bells and pomegranates, checkered tunic, sash, and linen undergarments. Every element serves a theological function: the priest carries Israel's names, bears Israel's guilt, announces his presence with sound, and proclaims God's holiness on his forehead.

29

Summary: *God prescribes the seven-day ordination ceremony for the priests — washing, dressing, anointing, and three sacrifices (bull for purification, ram for burnt offering, ram of ordination). The chapter culminates in God's promise: 'I will dwell among the sons of Israel and be their God.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The ordination ceremony (millu'im, 'filling of the hands') transforms ordinary Israelites into priests through a sequence of washing, clothing, anointing, and sacrifice. Blood is applied to the right ear, right thumb, and right big toe of the priests (v20) — consecrating hearing, action, and walk. The climactic promise of v45-46 states the purpose of the entire exodus: 'I will dwell among the sons of Israel and be their God... who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them.' The tabernacle is the goal; the exodus was the means.*

Translation Friction: We rendered millu'im as 'ordination' rather than the literal 'filling of hands,' though we noted the idiom — in the ancient Near East, having one's hands filled meant being authorized for office. The three sacrifices serve distinct functions (purification, devotion, consecration) that the English word 'offering' tends to flatten; we specified each type. The blood on ear, thumb, and toe (v20) we rendered literally, letting the ritual symbolism speak through the strangeness of the act.

Connections: The ordination is executed in Leviticus 8-9. The ear-thumb-toe blood application connects to the cleansing ritual for healed skin disease in Leviticus 14:14. The indwelling promise (v45-46) echoes the covenant formula of 6:7 and points forward to John 1:14 and Revelation 21:3. The daily burnt offering (vv38-42) establishes the perpetual worship pattern that continues through Israel's temple history.

¹"This is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to serve Me as priests: Take one young bull and two unblemished rams, ²along with unleavened bread, unleavened loaves mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil — made from wheat flour. ³Place them in a single basket and bring them in the basket, along with the bull and the two rams. ⁴Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. ⁵Take the garments and dress Aaron in the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod, and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him with its waistband. ⁶Place the turban on his head and set the holy diadem on the turban. ⁷Take the anointing oil, pour it on his head, and anoint him. ⁸Bring his sons forward and dress them in tunics. ⁹Bind sashes on Aaron and his sons and put caps on them. The priesthood shall be theirs as a permanent statute. Then you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. ¹⁰Bring the bull before the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the bull's head. ¹¹Slaughter the bull before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ¹²Take some of the bull's blood and apply it to the horns of the altar with your finger. Pour all the remaining blood at the base of the altar. ¹³Take all the fat covering the entrails, the lobe of the liver, the two kidneys, and the fat on them, and turn them into smoke on the altar. ¹⁴But the flesh of the bull, its hide, and its dung you shall burn outside the camp. It is a purification offering. ¹⁵Take the first ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the ram's head. ¹⁶Slaughter the ram, collect its blood, and dash it against the sides of the altar. ¹⁷Cut the ram into sections, wash its entrails and legs, and arrange them with the other sections and the head. ¹⁸Turn the entire ram into smoke on the altar — it is a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleasing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. ¹⁹Take the second ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. ²⁰Slaughter the ram and take some of its blood. Apply it to the lobe of Aaron's right ear, the lobe of his sons' right ears, the thumb of their right hands, and the big toe of their right feet. Dash the remaining blood against the sides of the altar. ²¹Take some of the blood from the altar and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments, and on his sons and their garments. He and his garments will be consecrated, along with his sons and their garments. ²²Take from the ram the fat, the fat tail, the fat covering the entrails, the lobe of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat on them, and the right thigh — for it is the ram of ordination. ²³Take one round loaf, one loaf of oiled bread, and one wafer from the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD. ²⁴Place everything on the palms of Aaron and his sons, and elevate them as a wave offering before the LORD. ²⁵Then take them from their hands and turn them into smoke on the altar, on top of the burnt offering — a pleasing aroma before the LORD, a fire offering to the LORD. ²⁶Take the breast of Aaron's ordination ram and elevate it as a wave offering before the LORD. It shall be your portion. ²⁷Consecrate the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the contribution — what was elevated and what was offered — from the ordination ram of Aaron and his sons. ²⁸This shall be a permanent allotment for Aaron and his sons from the Israelites, for it is a contribution — a contribution the Israelites give to the LORD from their peace offering sacrifices. ²⁹Aaron's sacred garments shall pass to his sons after him, for their anointing and ordination in them. ³⁰The son who succeeds him as priest shall wear them for seven days when he enters the tent of meeting to serve in the holy place. ³¹Take the ordination ram and boil its meat in a holy place. ³²Aaron and his sons shall eat the ram's meat and the bread from the basket at the entrance of the tent of meeting. ³³They shall eat the things through which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration. No unauthorized person may eat them — they are holy. ³⁴If any of the ordination meat or bread remains until morning, burn the remainder in fire. It must not be eaten — it is holy. ³⁵Do this for Aaron and his sons exactly as I have commanded you. Their ordination shall last seven days. ³⁶Offer a bull as a purification offering each day for atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and

anoint it to consecrate it. ³⁷For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. The altar will become most holy — whatever touches it becomes holy. ³⁸"This is what you shall offer on the altar: two year-old lambs each day, regularly. ³⁹Offer one lamb in the morning and the second lamb at twilight, ⁴⁰with the first lamb: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter hin of pressed oil, and a quarter hin of wine as a drink offering. ⁴¹Offer the second lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and drink offering as in the morning — a pleasing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. ⁴²This is a perpetual burnt offering throughout your generations, at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD — where I will meet with you to speak with you there. ⁴³I will meet there with the Israelites, and it will be sanctified by My glory. ⁴⁴I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. ⁴⁵I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. ⁴⁶They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The consecration ceremony (millu'im — 'ordination, filling of hands') requires three animals: one bull (par) and two rams (eilim). The bull will serve as a purification offering (v10-14), the first ram as a burnt offering (v15-18), and the second ram — uniquely — as the 'ram of ordination' (v19-28). Three animals for three ritual functions: purification, devotion, and consecration. The phrase leqaddesh otam lekahen li ('to consecrate them to serve Me as priests') defines the ceremony's purpose.
2. Three types of unleavened bread accompany the animal sacrifices — the same three forms as the grain offering (Lev 2:4): plain bread (lechem matzot), loaves mixed with oil (challot matzot belulot bashemen), and wafers spread with oil (reqiqei matzot meshuchim bashemen). All from solet chittim ('wheat flour' — premium flour). The bread will be used in the ordination ceremony's wave offering (v23-25).
3. All the bread goes into one basket (sal echad) for presentation alongside the three animals. The unified basket symbolizes the integrated nature of the ceremony: grain and animal offerings together constitute the full ordination provision.
4. The ceremony begins at petach ohel mo'ed ('the entrance of the tent of meeting') — the threshold between ordinary and sacred space. The first act: verachasta otam bamayim ('wash them with water'). Washing precedes everything else — the priests must be ritually purified before dressing, anointing, or sacrificing. The water removes the common-zone status; what follows builds the sacred status.
5. The dressing sequence is inside-out: kuttonet ('tunic' — next to skin), me'il ha'efod ('robe of the ephod' — the blue garment), efod ('ephod' — the outer vest), and choshen ('breastpiece'). Moses dresses Aaron — the high priest does not dress himself for consecration. The passive receiving of garments emphasizes that the priestly office is given, not taken. Aaron stands still while Moses clothes him in sacred identity.
6. The mitsnefet ('turban') goes on last — the head covering. The nezer haqqodesh ('holy diadem/crown') is the golden plate inscribed 'HOLY TO THE LORD' (28:36). The word nezer also means 'consecration' (as in the Nazirite's nezer, Num 6:7) — the crown is both a visible badge and a status marker. The dressing is complete: Aaron now wears every element described in chapter 28.
7. The anointing — velaqachta et-shemen hammishchah veyatsaqta al-rosho — is the defining act of consecration. The oil (the sacred blend of 30:22-33) is poured on Aaron's head, flowing down over the garments (Ps 133:2 describes it running down Aaron's beard to the collar of his robes). The verb mashachta ('anoint') is the root of mashiach ('messiah, anointed one'). Aaron becomes the first mashiach — the anointed priest.
8. Aaron's sons receive the simpler priestly wardrobe: kuttonot ('tunics'). Their dressing is briefer — three items (tunic, sash, caps) compared to Aaron's eight-piece ensemble. The brevity reflects the distinction between the high priest and ordinary priests.
9. With all garments in place — sashes (avnet) and caps (migba'ot) completing the ensemble — the priesthood becomes a permanent institution: vehaytah lahem kehunnah lechuqqat olam ('the priesthood shall be theirs as a permanent statute'). The phrase umilleita yad-Aharon veyad-banav ('you shall fill the hand of Aaron and his sons') is the technical term for ordination. 'Filling the hand' (millu'im) may refer to placing the offering portions in the priests' hands (v24) — the gesture that officially commissions them for service.
10. The first sacrifice: the bull as purification offering (chata't, v14). Aaron and all his sons perform semikhah together — they press their hands on the bull's head as a group. This is the same identification gesture from Leviticus 1:4 and 4:4, but here the soon-to-be-priests identify with the animal that will purify the altar for their future service. They cannot serve at an impure altar; the bull's blood will cleanse it.
11. Moses performs the slaughter — not Aaron, who is not yet consecrated to handle sacrificial blood. The location petach ohel mo'ed ('at the entrance of the tent of meeting') is the standard slaughter site for offerings.
12. The blood application follows the chata't procedure for a leader or commoner (Lev 4:25, 30): finger-applied to the altar horns, remainder poured at the base. The altar itself must be purified before it can receive regular offerings — consecration cleanses the instrument of worship before the worshippers are consecrated to use it.
13. The standard fat-portion formula (Lev 3:3-4, 4:8-9): internal fat, liver lobe, two kidneys with their fat — all burned on the altar. The fat belongs to God, as established throughout the offering system.

14. The bull's remaining parts are burned outside the camp (*michutz lamachaneh*) — the standard disposal for the priestly *chata't* (*Lev* 4:11-12, 6:23). The identification *chattat hu* ('it is a purification offering') classifies this sacrifice. The altar has been purified; the priests can now proceed to the burnt offering.
15. The second sacrifice: the first ram as a burnt offering (*olah*, v18). Again, collective *semikhah* — all five men press their hands on the animal. The progression from *chata't* (purification) to *olah* (total devotion) follows the standard Levitical sequence: cleansing before surrender.
16. The *olah* blood is dashed (*zaraqta* — the forceful splashing, not finger-painting) against the altar on all sides (*saviv*). This matches the standard *olah* procedure of *Leviticus* 1:5, 11.
17. The standard *olah* butchering procedure from *Leviticus* 1:6-9: sectioning, washing the entrails and legs, then arranging all parts on the altar.
18. The *olah* is entirely consumed: *vehiqarta et-kol-ha'ayil* ('turn the entire ram into smoke'). The threefold identification — *olah hu laYHWH*, reach *nichoach*, *issheh laYHWH* — emphasizes the completeness of the offering. Total devotion precedes the ordination sacrifice (v19-28) that will follow.
19. The third and most distinctive sacrifice: *eil hammillu'im* — the 'ram of ordination' (named in v22). This ram is unique in the sacrificial system: its blood is applied to the priests' bodies (v20), and its meat is used in a wave offering that the priests themselves eat (v31-34). No other offering in the Torah has this character.
20. The ordination blood application is unique in the Torah: blood on the ear (*tenukh ozen* — 'earlobe,' the organ of hearing/obedience), the thumb (*bohen yad* — the hand's primary working digit), and the big toe (*bohen regel* — the foot's weight-bearing digit). Three body parts representing three dimensions of priestly service: hearing God's word (ear), doing God's work (hand), and walking in God's ways (foot). The right side (*yemanit*) is the side of strength and honor. The entire priest — hearing, acting, walking — is consecrated by blood.
21. Blood and oil together — the two consecrating substances — are sprinkled on both the priests and their garments. The result: *veqadash hu uvegadav uvanav uvigdei vanav itto* ('he and his garments and his sons and his sons' garments with him will be consecrated'). Person and clothing are consecrated as a unit — the garments are not merely worn by holy people; they are themselves made holy through the same blood and oil. The priest's identity and his vestments are inseparable.
22. The ordination ram's portions include everything given to God in a *shelamim* (fat, liver lobe, kidneys) plus the right thigh (*shoq hayyamin*) — which in normal *shelamim* goes to the priest (*Lev* 7:32-33). Here it is part of the consecration offering itself. The identification *ki eil millu'im hu* ('for it is the ram of ordination') names this unique sacrifice. The *millu'im* exists only for this purpose — priestly installation — and is never repeated in the regular sacrificial calendar.
23. One piece from each of the three bread types prepared in v2 — a representative selection from the basket. The bread is placed before the LORD (*lifnei YHWH*) — it has been in God's presence during the entire ceremony.
24. This is the act that gives the ceremony its name: *vesamta hakkol al kappei Aharon ve'al kappei vanav* ('place everything on the palms of Aaron and his sons'). Their hands are literally 'filled' (*millu'im*) with the offerings. The filled-hands gesture — fat, thigh, and bread all resting on the priests' open palms — is the physical commissioning: you now hold sacred things. The wave offering (*tenufah*) before the LORD presents the filled hands to God for approval.
25. Moses takes the items back from the priests' hands and burns them on the altar. The cycle is complete: offerings placed in hands (commissioning), then given to God (worship). The priests' first act with filled hands is to surrender what was given — the priesthood's inaugural gesture is giving to God.
26. The breast (*chazeh*) of the ordination ram goes to Moses — *vehayah lekha lemanah* ('it shall be your portion'). In the regular *shelamim*, the breast goes to the priests (*Lev* 7:31). But at this ceremony, Moses is the officiant — the one who consecrates the priests — and he receives the officiant's share. Moses functions as the priest who creates priests.
27. The breast (*chazeh hattenufah*) and thigh (*shoq hatterumah*) are formally consecrated — *qiddashta* — as sacred portions. These two cuts become the permanent priestly allotment from all future *shelamim* (*Lev* 7:31-34). The ordination ceremony establishes the precedent that governs all subsequent priestly food rights.
28. The ordination establishes the *choq-olam* ('permanent statute') governing priestly food rights. The breast and thigh from every future *shelamim* will go to Aaron's priestly line — *terumah* ('contribution') from Israel to God, given through God to the priests. The system is circular: Israel gives to God; God gives to the priests; the priests serve Israel. Everyone provides, everyone receives.
29. The high priestly garments are hereditary — *uvigdei haqqodesh asher le'Aharon yihyu levanav acharav* ('Aaron's sacred garments shall be for his sons after him'). Each new high priest wears the same garments for their *lemoshchah bahem ullemalle-vam et-yadam* ('anointing and hand-filling'). The garments outlast any individual priest — the vestments carry the office across generations.
30. The successor wears the garments for *shiv'at yamim* ('seven days') — a full week of wearing the sacred vestments before beginning regular service. The seven-day investiture period allows the new priest to grow into the garments and the identity they represent.
31. The ordination ram's meat (remaining after the fat, thigh, and breast have been removed) is boiled (*bishalta* — 'cooked by boiling') in a sacred precinct (*maqom qadosh*). This cooked meat will be the priests' consecration meal (v32-33) — their first priestly meal, eaten at the threshold of their new identity.

- 32.** The consecration meal: ve'akhal Aharon uvanav et-besar ha'ayil ve'et-hallechem asher bassal ('Aaron and his sons shall eat the ram's meat and the bread from the basket'). The first priestly meal is eaten at petach ohel mo'ed ('the entrance of the tent of meeting') — the same threshold where the ceremony began (v4). The priests eat the consecration sacrifice at the boundary between ordinary and sacred space, physically consuming their new identity.
- 33.** The food's function: asher kuppar bahem ('through which atonement was made') — the meat and bread are not merely food but the substance of atonement and consecration. Eating is the final act of the ordination: the consecration enters the priests' bodies. The restriction — vezar lo-yokhal ki-qodesh hem ('no unauthorized person may eat, for they are holy') — limits this meal to the consecrated priests. The zar ('unauthorized/outsider') cannot participate in what makes the priesthood.
- 34.** Same-day consumption rule (as with the todah, Lev 7:15): nothing may survive until morning. Leftover consecration food is burned — not discarded but destroyed by fire, because ki-qodesh hu ('it is holy'). Holy food that exceeds its time window becomes dangerous, not merely stale.
- 35.** The entire ceremony (v1-34) is repeated for seven consecutive days: shiv'at yamim temalle yadam ('seven days you shall fill their hands'). Seven days of the same sacrifices, the same dressing, the same meal. The repetition is not redundancy but saturation — the priests are immersed in consecration for a complete cycle of time.
- 36.** A daily chata't bull for the full seven days — seven bulls total for altar purification alone. The altar is both purified (chitte'ta — 'de-sin, purge') and anointed (umashachta oto leqaddesho — 'anoint it to consecrate it'). The consecration of the priests and the consecration of the altar happen simultaneously — both must be ready before the regular sacrificial system can begin.
- 37.** After seven days of purification: vehayah hammizbeach qodesh qodashim ('the altar will be most holy'). The contagious holiness principle: kol-hannogea bammizbeach yiqdash ('whatever touches the altar becomes holy'). The altar's holiness is so intense that contact with it consecrates — a dangerous property that requires careful management. The seven-day consecration transforms common bronze into the most holy surface in the courtyard.
- 38.** The consecration legislation transitions to the tamid — the daily offering that will continue in perpetuity after the ordination is complete. Kevasim benei-shanah shenayim layyom tamid ('two year-old lambs each day, continually'). The morning and evening tamid (v39-41) is the heartbeat of the sacrificial system — every day, without exception, two lambs are offered. The priests ordained in v1-37 will spend their careers performing this daily ritual.
- 39.** The daily rhythm: babboqer ('in the morning') and bein ha'arbayim ('at twilight'). The day is bracketed by sacrifice — Israel's first and last communal act each day is worship. The morning lamb starts the sacred day; the evening lamb closes it.
- 40.** Each lamb is accompanied by a grain offering (issaron solet — a tenth ephah of flour with pressed oil) and a drink offering (nesekh — a quarter hin of wine). The daily offering is not just animal sacrifice but a full meal presented to God: bread (flour), oil, meat (lamb), and drink (wine). God's 'table' is set twice daily with the elements of a complete meal.
- 41.** The evening offering mirrors the morning exactly: keminchah habboqer ukheniskhah ('like the morning's grain offering and drink offering'). The symmetry ensures that every day begins and ends identically: the same lamb, the same flour, the same oil, the same wine, the same fire, the same pleasing aroma. The daily rhythm never varies.
- 42.** The tamid is olat tamid ledoroteikhem ('a perpetual burnt offering throughout your generations'). The location — petach ohel-mo'ed lifnei YHWH — is further defined: asher ivva'ed lakhem shammah ledabber elekha sham ('where I will meet with you to speak with you there'). The daily offering is not merely a ritual obligation but the occasion for divine encounter. God meets Israel at the altar — the tamid creates the conditions for communication between heaven and earth. Every morning and evening, God speaks at the place where the offering ascends.
- 43.** Veno'adti shammah livnei Yisra'el ('I will meet there with the Israelites') — God commits to a specific location for encounter. Veniqdash bikhvodi ('and it will be sanctified by My glory') — the kavod register term in its most powerful context: God's glory does not merely visit the tabernacle; it sanctifies it. The divine presence transforms the space from constructed tent to sacred dwelling. The kavod that fills the tabernacle (40:34) is the glory that sanctifies it here.
- 44.** God speaks in first person: veqidhashti ('I will consecrate'). The entire preceding ceremony — Moses washing, dressing, anointing, sacrificing — is validated by divine action. Ultimately, it is God who consecrates the tent, the altar, and the priests. Human ceremony enacts what divine power accomplishes. The sequence — tent, altar, persons — covers the full scope of sacred space and sacred personnel.
- 45.** The climax of the entire tabernacle legislation: veshakhanti betokh benei Yisra'el ('I will dwell in the midst of the Israelites'). Everything from Exodus 25 through 29 — the ark, the table, the menorah, the curtains, the altar, the courtyard, the garments, the consecration — exists to make this dwelling possible. The Shekhinah concept begins here: God taking up permanent residence among His people. Vehayiti lahem le'Elohim ('I will be their God') — the covenant formula from Leviticus 26:12 and throughout the Bible — appears as the consequence of divine indwelling. Presence produces relationship.
- 46.** The final verse redefines the exodus itself: asher hotseti otam me'erets Mitsrayim leshakhni betokham ('who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them'). The purpose of the exodus was not merely liberation from slavery but the creation of a community in which God could dwell. God did not bring Israel out of Egypt so they could be free — He brought them out so He could live among them. Freedom was the means; divine presence was the end. The closing signature — ani YHWH Eloheim ('I am the LORD their God') — appears twice in two verses (v45-46), framing the Shekhinah promise with the divine identity. The chapter ends where the entire tabernacle section began: with the God who wants to

dwell with His people.

30

Summary: *God prescribes the gold incense altar for the Holy Place, the half-shekel census offering as 'ransom for your lives,' the bronze basin for priestly washing, the holy anointing oil, and the sacred incense. Each is restricted to sacred use only.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The incense altar appears last among the tabernacle furnishings, after priestly garments and ordination — its ministry belongs to consecrated priests alone. The census ransom (kofer nafsho, 'ransom for his life,' v12) establishes that counting people is theologically freighted: to number Israel is to claim what belongs to God, and a payment acknowledges divine ownership. The anointing oil recipe and incense formula are given once and declared permanently exclusive — 'whoever compounds any like it... shall be cut off from his people' (vv33, 38). Sacred recipes are not for private use.*

Translation Friction: *We rendered kofer as 'ransom' to preserve the redemption theology — each person pays because their life belongs to God and numbering them without acknowledgment of this is dangerous. The anointing oil ingredients (myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, cassia, olive oil) we rendered with their standard English names, though some identifications are approximate. The phrase 'cut off from his people' (nikrat, v33) we retained literally — the exact penalty (death, exile, or divine punishment) is debated, but the severity is clear.*

Connections: *The incense altar is the setting for Zechariah's vision in Luke 1:8-11. The census ransom anticipates the temple tax of Matthew 17:24-27. The anointing oil connects to the royal anointing tradition (1 Samuel 16:13) and the messianic title 'Anointed One' (Mashiach). The Day of Atonement blood on the incense altar horns (v10) is prescribed in Leviticus 16:18.*

¹"You shall make an altar for burning incense. Make it of acacia wood. ²It shall be one cubit long and one cubit wide — square — and two cubits high. Its horns shall be of one piece with it. ³Overlay it with pure gold — its top, its sides all around, and its horns — and make a gold molding around it. ⁴Make two gold rings for it below the molding, on its two sides — on opposite sides — as holders for the poles used to carry it. ⁵Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ⁶Place it in front of the veil that screens the ark of the testimony — before the atonement cover that is over the testimony — where I will meet with you. ⁷Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it every morning — when he tends the lamps, he shall burn it. ⁸When Aaron lights the lamps at twilight, he shall burn it — perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations. ⁹You must not offer unauthorized incense on it, nor burnt offering, nor grain offering, and you must not pour a drink offering on it. ¹⁰Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns — with the blood of the purification offering of atonement, once a year he shall purify it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD." ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses: ¹²"When you take a census of the Israelites by counting them, each person shall give a ransom for his life to the LORD at the time of the counting, so that no plague will strike them when they are counted. ¹³This is what each person who is registered shall give: half a shekel by the sanctuary standard (the shekel being twenty gerahs) — a half shekel as a contribution to the LORD. ¹⁴Everyone who is registered, from twenty years old and above, shall give the LORD's contribution. ¹⁵The wealthy must not give more, and the poor must not give less than the half shekel, when giving the LORD's contribution to make atonement for your lives. ¹⁶Take the atonement money from the Israelites and designate it for the service of the tent of meeting. It shall serve as a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, to make atonement for your lives." ¹⁷The LORD spoke to Moses: ¹⁸"Make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. ¹⁹Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet from it. ²⁰When they enter the tent of meeting they shall wash with water so they will not die, or when they approach the altar to serve, turning fire offerings into smoke for the LORD. ²¹They shall wash their hands and feet so they will not die — a permanent statute for him and his descendants throughout their generations." ²²The LORD spoke to Moses: ²³"Take the finest spices: five hundred shekels of liquid myrrh, half that amount

— two hundred fifty — of fragrant cinnamon, two hundred fifty of fragrant cane, ²⁴five hundred of cassia — all by the sanctuary standard — and a hin of olive oil. ²⁵Make it into a sacred anointing oil — a perfumer's compound, expertly blended. It shall be a sacred anointing oil. ²⁶With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, ²⁷the table and all its utensils, the lampstand and its utensils, the altar of incense, ²⁸the burnt offering altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its stand. ²⁹You shall consecrate them so they become most holy. Whatever touches them becomes holy. ³⁰You shall anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them to serve Me as priests. ³¹Tell the Israelites: This shall be My sacred anointing oil throughout your generations. ³²It must not be poured on the body of any ordinary person, and you must not make anything with the same formula. It is holy — it shall be holy to you. ³³Anyone who blends something like it, or who puts any of it on an unauthorized person, shall be cut off from their people." ³⁴The LORD said to Moses, "Take aromatic spices — stacte, onycha, and galbanum — these spices along with pure frankincense, in equal parts. ³⁵Blend it into incense — a perfumer's compound, salted, pure, and holy. ³⁶Grind some of it to a fine powder and place it before the testimony in the tent of meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. ³⁷The incense that you make — you must not make any with the same formula for your own use. It shall be holy to you, reserved for the LORD. ³⁸Anyone who makes incense like it for personal enjoyment shall be cut off from their people."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The incense altar (mizbach miqtar qetoret) is introduced last among the tabernacle furnishings — separate from the main instructions in chapters 25-27. Its placement here, after the priestly garments (ch 28) and consecration (ch 29), may reflect its close association with priestly ministry: only consecrated priests burn incense. Acacia wood (atsei shittim) is the same material as the ark (25:10) and the table (25:23) — a hard, durable desert wood.
2. The dimensions: one cubit by one cubit by two cubits (approximately 18" x 18" x 36") — much smaller than the burnt offering altar (27:1, five cubits square). The incense altar is intimate, designed for the confined space of the holy place. The horns (qarnot) project from the four corners, as on the burnt offering altar — these become the points where the Day of Atonement blood is applied (v10). The phrase mimmennu qarnotav ('its horns from it') means the horns are carved from the same piece, not attached separately.
3. The incense altar is gold-covered (zahav tahor — 'pure gold'), placing it in the gold zone of the tabernacle (holy place) rather than the bronze zone (courtyard). The zer zahav ('gold molding/crown') is a decorative border running around the top, also found on the ark (25:11) and the table (25:24). The three gold-crowned furnishings — ark, table, incense altar — form the interior ensemble of the holy place.
4. The transport system: two gold rings on opposite sides hold the carrying poles. Like the ark (25:14-15) and the table (25:27-28), the incense altar must be portable — designed for a community on the move. The tabernacle's furnishings are built for travel; none are permanent installations.
5. Gold-overlaid acacia poles — the same construction as the ark's poles (25:13). Every element that enters the holy place must be gold-covered. The consistency of materials (acacia + gold) across all the holy place furnishings creates a unified aesthetic: warm wood wrapped in brilliant metal.
6. The incense altar's location is precisely defined: lifnei happarokhet ('before the veil') — in the holy place, directly in front of the curtain separating it from the most holy place. The text looks through the veil to identify what lies behind it: the kapporet ('atonement cover') over the ark. The phrase asher ivva'ed lekha shammah ('where I will meet with you there') makes the incense altar the point closest to God's presence that the daily priestly ministry reaches. The incense rises toward the veil — toward God — every morning and evening.
7. The daily incense offering is coordinated with the lamp maintenance: babboqer babboqer ('every morning, morning by morning') the priest tends the menorah's lamps and burns incense simultaneously. The two daily rituals — light and fragrance — together fill the holy place. The qetoret sammim ('fragrant incense') is the specific blend prescribed in v34-38, never to be reproduced for common use.
8. The evening complement to the morning incense (v7): bein ha'arbayim ('between the evenings,' i.e., at twilight). The designation qetoret tamid ('perpetual incense') parallels the perpetual fire of 27:20 and the perpetual lamp — the holy place never lacks light, fragrance, or fire. The incense is lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD') — directed toward the divine presence behind the veil. Prayer is later associated with incense (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8): the ascending smoke represents communication directed upward toward God.
9. Four prohibitions protect the incense altar's exclusive function: no qetoret zarah ('unauthorized incense' — the same adjective zarah used for Nadab and Abihu's 'unauthorized fire' in Lev 10:1), no olah, no minchah, no nesekh ('drink offering'). The incense altar has one purpose only: the authorized daily incense. It is not a general-purpose altar. The restriction underscores the principle that proximity to God requires exact obedience to prescribed forms.
10. The phrase middam chattat hakkippurim ('with the blood of the purification offering of atonements') refers to the Yom Kippur chata't described in Leviticus 16. The annual purification of the incense altar is one element of the Day of Atonement ritual. The designation qodesh qodashim hu laYHWH ('it is most holy to the LORD') classifies the incense altar at the highest sanctity level — the same category as the most holy offerings. The altar's holiness requires annual maintenance: even sacred objects accumulate the residue of a year's proximity to human impurity.

11. A new divine speech introduces the census atonement tax (v11-16) — a half-shekel per person collected whenever Israel is counted. The section shifts from sacred architecture to sacred economics: how does the community fund the tabernacle's ongoing operation?
12. The census is dangerous: counting people exposes them to divine attention in a way that can trigger plague (negef). The *kofer nafsho* ('ransom for his life/soul') is a payment that substitutes for the person — each individual 'redeems' themselves from the risk of being counted. The theology behind this is complex: numbering implies ownership (you count what belongs to you), and claiming ownership of what belongs to God requires a ransom payment. David's unauthorized census in 2 Samuel 24 demonstrates what happens when the ransom is not paid.
13. The amount is fixed: *machatsit hasheqel* ('half a shekel') by the sanctuary weight standard (*sheqel haqqodesh*). Twenty *gerahs* equals one shekel — approximately 11 grams of silver. The half-shekel is modest but mandatory: rich and poor pay the same amount (v15). The *terumah laYHWH* ('contribution to the LORD') designates it as sacred revenue, not civil taxation. This half-shekel later became the annual temple tax that Jesus discusses in Matthew 17:24-27.
14. The age threshold: *mibben esrim shanah vama'lah* ('from twenty years old and upward'). Twenty is the age of military service and census eligibility (Num 1:3). Only adults who count in the national register pay the ransom. The contribution is universal within this demographic — every adult male Israelite, regardless of wealth or status, pays the same half-shekel.
15. The most egalitarian provision in the Torah: *he'ashir lo yarbeh vehadal lo yam'it* ('the rich shall not give more, the poor shall not give less'). Before God, every life has the same value. The rich person's life is not worth more than the poor person's; the poor person's ransom is not discounted. The phrase *lekhapper al-nafshoteikhem* ('to make atonement for your lives') connects the census payment to *kippur* — this is not a fee but a redemption. Equal payment, equal value, equal standing before God.
16. The census money (*kesef hakkippurim* — 'atonement silver') funds the tabernacle's operations (*avodat ohel mo'ed* — 'the service of the tent of meeting'). The money has a dual function: it ransoms the counted and it sustains the sanctuary. The designation *lezikkaron* ('as a memorial') means the payment keeps Israel in God's awareness — a permanent financial sign of the covenant relationship. The tabernacle is funded by the community's redemption payments: the building where God dwells is sustained by the ransom of the people who dwell around it.
17. A new speech introduces the bronze basin (v17-21) — the washing station positioned between the tent of meeting and the burnt offering altar where priests purify their hands and feet before serving.
18. The *kiyor nechoshet* ('bronze basin') occupies a transitional position: *bein-ohel mo'ed uvein hammizbeach* ('between the tent of meeting and the altar') — the priest passes it when moving from the outer court to the tent. Bronze (*nechoshet*) identifies it with the outer court zone. The basin is purely functional: it holds water for priestly washing before service. No dimensions are given (unlike every other tabernacle furnishing), suggesting the basin's size was practical rather than symbolic.
19. Hands and feet — the instruments of priestly work (hands manipulate offerings) and priestly movement (feet walk on sacred ground). The washing is not for hygiene but for ritual fitness: the priest's body must be purified at its points of contact with sacred space and sacred objects. Every transition from common to sacred activity requires this washing.
20. The consequence of unwashed service is death: *velo yamutu* ('so they will not die'). Two occasions require washing: entering the tent of meeting (*bevo'am el-ohel mo'ed*) and approaching the altar (*begishtam el-hammizbeach*). The priestly body, unwashed, brings common-zone contamination into sacred space — and the collision between common and holy is lethal. The basin is not a convenience but a life-preserving boundary marker.
21. The washing requirement is *chuq-olam* ('a permanent statute') — the same perpetual designation given to the Sabbath (31:16), the fat-and-blood prohibition (Lev 3:17), and the priestly food allocation (Lev 7:34). Priestly washing is permanent, non-negotiable, and extends *lo ulezar'o ledorotam* ('for him and his descendants throughout their generations'). The ritual purity of the priesthood is as permanent as the priesthood itself.
22. A new speech introduces the anointing oil formula (v22-33) — a sacred blend reserved exclusively for consecrating the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests. This is followed by the incense formula (v34-38). Both are proprietary recipes: unauthorized reproduction is prohibited on pain of being 'cut off' from Israel.
23. The anointing oil recipe begins with *besamim rosh* ('finest/chief spices'). Three aromatic ingredients are measured by weight in sanctuary shekels: *mor-deror* ('liquid myrrh' — 500 shekels, about 12.5 lbs), *qinnemon-besem* ('fragrant cinnamon' — 250 shekels), and *qeneh-vosem* ('fragrant cane/calamus' — 250 shekels). These are luxury trade goods from distant regions — myrrh from Arabia, cinnamon likely from South or Southeast Asia, cane from tropical sources. The anointing oil is composed of the world's most precious aromatics.
24. The fourth spice: *qiddah* ('cassia' — 500 shekels, matching the myrrh). The base liquid is *shemen zayit hin* ('a hin of olive oil' — approximately one gallon). The total spice weight (1,500 shekels, roughly 37 lbs) infused in one gallon of olive oil would produce an extraordinarily concentrated, intensely fragrant anointing oil. The sanctuary standard (*sheqel haqqodesh*) ensures precise measurement.
25. The phrase *roqach mirqachat ma'aseh roqeach* ('a perfumer's compound, the work of a perfumer') uses the root *r-q-ch* ('to blend, to compound') three times — the blending must be done by a skilled craftsman, not casually. The double designation *shemen mishchat-qodesh* ('sacred anointing oil') appears at both the beginning and end of the verse, framing the formula as exclusively holy. Once blended, this oil exists in a category of its own — it is *qodesh* and may never be used for common purposes.
26. The anointing sequence begins with the most sacred items: the tent of meeting and the ark. Anointing with oil consecrates — it transfers the object from common to sacred status. The oil's application follows the same inside-out pattern as the tabernacle's construction: innermost objects first.

27. The holy place furnishings: table (with showbread utensils), menorah (with lamp-tending tools), and incense altar. Each item and its associated equipment are anointed — holiness extends to every tool that touches the sacred space.
28. The outer court furnishings: burnt offering altar and basin. Even the bronze-zone items receive the sacred oil — the anointing consecrates the entire tabernacle complex from the most holy place to the outer courtyard.
29. The anointing elevates everything to qodesh qodashim ('most holy') status. The contagious holiness principle returns: kol-hannogea bahem yiqdash ('whatever touches them becomes holy'). Once anointed, these objects transmit their sanctity to anything they contact — a chain reaction of holiness that requires careful management. Sacred space is not merely set apart; it is actively, dangerously holy.
30. The anointing of persons follows the anointing of objects: Aaron and his sons are consecrated with the same oil as the tabernacle. The purpose clause — lekahen li ('to serve Me as priests') — defines the priesthood as personal service to God. The oil that consecrates sacred furniture also consecrates sacred persons: the priesthood is as holy as the space in which it operates.
31. God claims the oil as li ('Mine') — it belongs to God and is used only for God's purposes. The phrase ledoroteikhem ('throughout your generations') makes the recipe and its restrictions permanent. The sacred oil is not a one-time preparation but a perpetual formula maintained across Israel's entire history.
32. Two prohibitions: (1) the oil must not be applied to common persons (al-besar adam lo yisakh — 'it must not be poured on human flesh,' i.e., anyone who is not a priest or sacred object), and (2) the formula must not be reproduced (uvematkunato lo ta'asu kamohu — 'in its proportion you must not make anything like it'). The recipe is proprietary in the strongest sense — it belongs to God and may not be duplicated. The double declaration qodesh hu, qodesh yihyeh lakhem ('it is holy, it shall be holy to you') makes the prohibition absolute.
33. The penalty for violating either prohibition is karet — being 'cut off' from the community. Two offenses: yirqach kamohu ('blends something like it' — reproducing the formula) and yitten mimmennu al-zar ('puts any of it on an outsider/unauthorized person'). The zar here means anyone outside the priesthood — the same word used for 'unauthorized fire' (esh zarah, Lev 10:1). The sacred oil's exclusivity is protected by the most severe communal penalty.
34. The incense formula: four ingredients in equal parts (bad bevad — 'part by part'). Nataf ('stacte' — a resinous gum, possibly storax or balsam), shecheleth ('onycha' — possibly a mollusk shell or plant resin), chelvena ('galbanum' — a strong-smelling plant gum), and levonah zakkah ('pure frankincense'). Galbanum is notably pungent, almost unpleasant alone — its inclusion in a sacred blend suggests that the final product's fragrance emerges from the combination of individual components that would not be beautiful separately.
35. Three qualities: memullach ('salted' — salt is added as a preservative and purifier, echoing the 'salt of the covenant' in Lev 2:13), tahor ('pure'), and qodesh ('holy'). The incense is compounded by a professional roqeach ('perfumer/apothecary'). The salt-pure-holy triad applies covenant symbolism (salt), ritual fitness (purity), and sacred status (holiness) to the incense simultaneously.
36. The incense is ground fine (shachaqta mimmennah hadeq — 'crush some of it to powder') for maximum fragrance release when burned. Its location — lifnei ha'edut be'ohel mo'ed ('before the testimony in the tent of meeting') — places it at the center of the holy place, near the incense altar and facing the ark. The phrase asher ivva'ed lekha shammah ('where I will meet with you there') repeats from v6: the incense rises in the place of divine encounter. The classification qodesh qodashim ('most holy') matches the incense altar itself.
37. The same prohibition as for the anointing oil (v32): the formula is exclusive. Bematkunatah lo ta'asu lakhem ('in its formula you must not make any for yourselves'). Private reproduction of sacred incense is prohibited — the fragrance belongs solely to the divine encounter. The restriction ensures that the scent of the sacred incense is experienced only in the tabernacle, nowhere else. It is set apart for the LORD (qodesh tihyeh lekha laYHWH).
38. The penalty for unauthorized incense replication: karet. The specific offense is making it lehariach bah ('to smell it,' i.e., for personal enjoyment of the fragrance). The sacred incense exists for one purpose — to rise before the LORD in the tent of meeting. Using the same formula for personal pleasure profanes what belongs to God. The chapter closes as it opened (v1-10): with the incense system, the most intimate element of the tabernacle's daily worship. The incense altar, the census ransom, the washing basin, the anointing oil, and the sacred incense together form the operational infrastructure that makes ongoing worship possible.

31

Summary: God names Bezalel and Oholiab as master craftsmen, fills them with His Spirit for the tabernacle work, reaffirms the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant sign, and gives Moses the two stone tablets 'written with the finger of God.'

What Makes This Remarkable: Bezalel is the first individual in the Torah whom God fills with His Spirit (ruach Elohim, v3) for a specific task — and that task is not prophecy or warfare but artistry. The same Spirit that hovered over the waters in Genesis 1:2 now empowers a craftsman. The four gifts — wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill — cover the full spectrum from abstract design to practical execution. The Sabbath command (vv12-17) bookends the tabernacle instructions: even sacred construction must yield to sacred rest. The tablets 'written with the finger of God' (v18) echo the

magicians' recognition of 'the finger of God' in 8:19.

Translation Friction: *We rendered ruach Elohim as 'Spirit of God' with a capital S, following the tradition that this is a genuine endowment of divine creative power, not merely 'a spirit of skill.' The name Betzal'el ('in the shadow of God') and Oholiav ('the Father's tent') we transliterated in standard form. The phrase 'finger of God' (etsba Elohim, v18) we rendered literally, preserving the anthropomorphic image that the Hebrew employs without embarrassment.*

Connections: *The Spirit-filling of Bezalel anticipates the Spirit's empowerment in Judges (e.g., Judges 3:10; 6:34), the prophets (Isaiah 61:1), and Pentecost (Acts 2:4). The Sabbath as covenant sign (v13) parallels circumcision as covenant sign (Genesis 17:11). The tablets written by God's finger connect to the magicians' confession in 8:19 and to Jesus writing on the ground in John 8:6.*

¹The LORD spoke to Moses: ²"See — I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. ³I have filled him with the Spirit of God — with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and skill in every kind of craft: ⁴to design artistic works — to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ⁵in stone-cutting for settings, in wood-carving — to work in every kind of craft. ⁶I have also appointed alongside him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. And in the heart of every skilled person I have placed wisdom, so that they may make everything I have commanded you: ⁷the tent of meeting, the ark of the testimony, the atonement cover upon it, and all the furnishings of the tent, ⁸the table and its utensils, the pure gold lampstand with all its utensils, the altar of incense, ⁹the burnt offering altar with all its utensils, the basin and its stand, ¹⁰the woven service garments, the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons for their priestly service, ¹¹the anointing oil, and the fragrant incense for the holy place. They shall make everything exactly as I have commanded you." ¹²T he LORD said to Moses: ¹³"Speak to the Israelites and tell them: You must keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the LORD who makes you holy. ¹⁴You shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Anyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Anyone who does work on it — that person shall be cut off from their people. ¹⁵Six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD. Anyone who does work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶The Israelites shall keep the Sabbath, observing it throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant. ¹⁷It is a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and was refreshed. ¹⁸When He had finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, He gave him the two tablets of the testimony — stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. After seven chapters of tabernacle instructions (25-31), God now names the artisans who will build what He has described. The shift from design to execution is marked by this new speech formula. The plans come from God; the skill to realize them also comes from God.
2. God calls Bezalel 'by name' (beshemm) — a personal, specific summons, not a general appointment. The name Betzal'el means 'in the shadow of God' — the master craftsman works under divine protection. His lineage (Uri = 'my light,' Chur = possibly 'noble') is from Judah, the royal tribe. The first person God specifically commissions for a task in the Torah is not a priest or prophet but an artisan.
3. The phrase va'amalle oto ruach Elohim ('I have filled him with the Spirit of God') is the first instance in the Torah of the Spirit of God empowering a specific individual for a specific task. The four gifts — chokhmah ('wisdom'), tevunah ('understanding'), da'at ('knowledge'), and melakhah ('craft/workmanship') — cover the full spectrum from abstract design to practical execution. Artistic skill is presented as a divine endowment, not merely human talent. The Spirit of God enables sacred art.
4. The verb lachshov machashavot ('to devise designs, to think creative thoughts') uses the same root as 'thought' (machashavah). Artistic design is presented as a form of thinking — the craftsman does not merely follow blueprints but creates with intention and imagination. The three metals (gold, silver, bronze) are listed in descending value, matching the three zones of the tabernacle: gold in the holy of holies, silver for structural elements, bronze for the outer court.
5. Two additional materials beyond metals: stone (for the priestly breastplate settings, 28:17-20) and wood (for the ark, table, and structural frames). The comprehensive scope — bekhoh-melakhah ('every kind of craft') — makes Bezalel a master of all the materials required for the tabernacle. No separate specialist is needed; God's Spirit-gift covers the full range.
6. God appoints a second craftsman: Oholiab ('the father's tent') from Dan — pairing Judah (the leading tribe) with Dan (a lesser tribe) in shared creative work. Beyond these two named artisans, God gives chokhmah ('wisdom') to kol-chakham-lev ('every wise-hearted person') — the skill is

distributed broadly, not hoarded by an elite. The phrase *natatti chokhmah* ('I have placed wisdom') insists that even 'natural' talent is a divine gift. The closing clause — 'so they may make all I have commanded you' — connects the artisans' work directly to God's instructions in chapters 25-30.

7. The inventory of what must be built begins with the most sacred items: the tent of meeting (*ohel mo'ed*), the ark of the testimony (*aron ha'edut*), and the *kapporet* ('atonement cover/mercy seat') — the gold lid where God's presence dwells between the cherubim. The ordering follows the inside-out geography of the tabernacle: God's throne first, then the furnishings, then the outer structures.
8. Three holy place furnishings: the table (for the showbread, 25:23-30), the menorah (*hammenorah hattehorah* — 'the pure lampstand,' made of beaten gold, 25:31-40), and the incense altar (*mizbach haqetoret*, 30:1-10). These occupy the chamber directly before the veil — the space where priestly worship occurs daily.
9. The outer court furnishings: the burnt offering altar (*mizbach ha'olah*, the large bronze altar, 27:1-8) and the basin (*kiyor*, the bronze washing basin for priestly purification, 30:17-21). The inventory moves outward from the holy of holies through the holy place to the courtyard, tracing the path a worshipper would travel in reverse.
10. Two categories of priestly clothing: *bigdei hasserad* ('woven service garments' — possibly the fabric coverings for the tabernacle furnishings during transport) and *bigdei haqqodesh* ('holy garments' — the priestly vestments described in ch 28). Aaron's garments and his sons' garments are listed separately, reflecting the distinction between the high priest's elaborate eight-piece outfit and the standard priestly four-piece set.
11. The inventory closes with two sacred substances: the anointing oil (*shemen hammishchah*, 30:22-33) and the sacred incense (*qetoret hassammim*, 30:34-38) — both with specific formulas that may not be replicated for common use. The closing phrase *kekhol asher-tsvivtikha ya'asu* ('according to all I have commanded you they shall make') insists on exact execution. The artisans are Spirit-filled and creatively gifted, but their freedom operates within the boundaries of divine instruction.
12. A new divine speech introduces the Sabbath command (v12-17) — placed here, between the tabernacle instructions and the giving of the tablets, with deliberate theological purpose. The Sabbath is connected to both creation (v17) and the tabernacle. Building God's dwelling is the highest form of work, but even this work must stop for the Sabbath. No task — not even constructing God's house — overrides the rhythm God established at creation.
13. The Sabbath is identified as an *ot* ('sign') — the same word used for the rainbow (Gen 9:12) and circumcision (Gen 17:11). Each covenant has its sign: the Noahic covenant has the rainbow, the Abrahamic covenant has circumcision, and the Sinai covenant has the Sabbath. The purpose clause — *lada'at ki ani YHWH meqaddishkem* ('to know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you') — frames the Sabbath as a weekly declaration: God is the one who makes Israel holy. Holiness is not self-generated; it is received through obedience to God's rhythm.
14. Two penalties for Sabbath violation: death (*mot yumat* — the standard capital punishment formula) and *karet* ('cut off'). The verb *mechalleleha* ('profanes it') is from *chalal* ('to make common, to profane') — treating the holy as ordinary. Sabbath violation is not merely disobedience but profanation: collapsing the distinction between sacred time and common time. The severity reflects the Sabbath's status as the covenant sign — violating the sign repudiates the covenant.
15. The phrase *shabbat shabbaton* ('Sabbath of complete rest' — an intensified form, literally 'a sabbath of sabbath-ness') describes the most thoroughgoing cessation. The word *shabbaton* intensifies *shabbat* beyond ordinary rest into absolute, sacred stillness. This superlative form appears only for the weekly Sabbath and Yom Kippur (Lev 16:31) — the two most holy temporal observances.
16. The Sabbath is called *berit olam* ('everlasting covenant') — not merely a commandment but a covenant in its own right. This is the highest possible designation: the Sabbath itself is a covenant between God and Israel, permanent and binding across all generations. The phrase *ledorotam* ('throughout their generations') ensures perpetuity. Every Sabbath is a covenant renewal — a weekly re-entering of the agreement between God and His people.
17. The Sabbath is grounded in creation — the same rationale as Exodus 20:11. The final verb *vayyinnafash* ('was refreshed') is striking: from *nephesh* ('soul, being'), it suggests God was 're-souled' or 'caught His breath.' This is profoundly anthropomorphic — the infinite God is described as experiencing the refreshment of rest. The theological point: if God rested and was refreshed, how much more must humans? The Sabbath is not merely a rule but an imitation of divine behavior. Israel rests because God rested.
18. The chapter's final verse connects the entire Sinai legislation (chs 20-31) to its physical embodiment: *shenei luchot ha'edut* ('two tablets of the testimony'). These are not merely stone; they are *ketuvim be'etsba Elohim* ('written by the finger of God') — the only part of Scripture attributed to God's direct, physical inscription. The phrase *kekhaloto ledaber itto* ('when He finished speaking with him') marks the end of the divine audience that began in 24:18. Moses now descends carrying the evidence of everything God said — and descends into the catastrophe of the golden calf (ch 32).

32

Summary: *While Moses is on the mountain, the people pressure Aaron to make a golden calf. God tells Moses the people have corrupted themselves. Moses intercedes, descends, shatters the tablets, destroys the calf, and the Levites execute judgment. Moses returns to the LORD to plead for the people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The gold used for the calf was Egypt's plunder (12:35-36) — what God provided for His dwelling is redirected to construct His rival. The verb yatsar ('fashioned,' v4) is the same word for God forming humanity in Genesis 2:7; Aaron creates in parody of God. The unanimity of idolatry mirrors the unanimity of covenant acceptance at Sinai (24:3, 7). Moses's intercession (vv11-14) stakes everything on God's reputation among the nations and His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — covenant logic used to restrain covenant judgment.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase aseh-lanu elohim ('make us gods/a god,' v1) is ambiguous — elohim can be singular or plural. We rendered it 'gods' to capture the violation of the first commandment, while noting in our translator notes that a single image was produced. Aaron's explanation 'I threw it into the fire and out came this calf' (v24) we rendered literally, preserving his evasive, almost comic deflection of responsibility. Moses's offer 'blot me out of Your book' (v32) we rendered as a stark conditional, preserving its weight as the most radical intercessory offer in the Torah.*

Connections: *The golden calf is recalled in Deuteronomy 9:7-21; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19-23; and Acts 7:39-41. Moses as intercessor parallels Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Genesis 18:22-33). The shattered tablets are replaced in chapter 34. The Levites' zeal (v26-28) establishes their role as consecrated servants, developed in Numbers 3.*

¹When the people saw that Moses was long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Get up, make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ²Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a molten calf. They said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" ⁵When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." ⁶They rose early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to revel. ⁷The LORD said to Moses, "Go down, for your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly. ⁸They have turned aside quickly from the way I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf and have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.'" ⁹The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰Now leave Me alone, so that My anger may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make you into a great nation." ¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn hot against Your people, whom You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out with evil intent, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your burning anger and relent from this disaster against Your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Yourself and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ¹⁴The LORD relented from the disaster He had spoken of bringing on His people. ¹⁵Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hand — tablets written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. ¹⁶The tablets were God's own craftsmanship, and the writing engraved on the tablets was God's own writing. ¹⁷When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is a sound of war in the camp." ¹⁸But Moses said, "It is not the sound of the cry of victory, nor the sound of the cry of defeat. It is the sound of singing that I hear." ¹⁹As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing,

Moses's anger burned hot. He threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰He took the calf they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the sons of Israel drink it. ²¹Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" ²²Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot. You know this people, that they are set on evil. ²³They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ²⁴So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off.' They gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." ²⁵Moses saw that the people had broken loose, for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies. ²⁶Moses stood at the gate of the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" All the sons of Levi gathered around him. ²⁷He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Each of you put his sword on his side. Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother, his companion, and his neighbor." ²⁸The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. ²⁹Moses said, "Today you have been ordained for the LORD, each at the cost of his son and his brother, so that He might bestow a blessing on you this day." ³⁰The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. Now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ³¹Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³²But now, if You will forgive their sin — but if not, please blot me out of the book that You have written." ³³The LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out of My book. ³⁴Now go, lead the people to the place I told you about. My angel will go before you. But on the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them." ³⁵The LORD struck the people because they made the calf — the one Aaron had made.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Moses has been on the mountain forty days (24:18). The people's impatience is both understandable and catastrophic. 'Make us gods' (aseh-lanu elohim) — the plural elohim can mean 'gods' or 'a god.' The request violates the first and second commandments simultaneously. 'This Moses' (Mosheh zeh) — the demonstrative zeh ('this') is dismissive, reducing the deliverer to 'that man.'
2. Aaron's compliance is immediate — no protest, no objection, no appeal to the covenant just ratified. The gold rings from Egypt (12:35-36) — the plunder that was supposed to build the tabernacle is redirected to build an idol. What God provided for His dwelling is used to construct His rival.
3. The people comply instantly — the unanimity of idolatry mirrors the unanimity of covenant acceptance at Sinai (24:3, 7). The same people who said 'we will do and we will obey' now do and obey the command to make an idol.
4. 'He fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a molten calf' (vayyatsar oto bacheret vayyya'asehu egel massekhah) — the verb yatsar ('to fashion, to form') is the same verb used for God forming humanity from dust (Genesis 2:7). Aaron creates in parody of God. The calf (egel) likely represents the Apis bull or Hathor cow of Egyptian religion — Israel reverts to the worship forms of the land they just left.
5. Aaron tries to syncretize: he builds an altar before the calf but declares 'a feast to the LORD' (chag laYHWH). He attempts to worship YHWH through the golden calf — merging the God of Sinai with the image of Egypt. This is not atheism but syncretic idolatry, which is worse: it uses God's name to validate what God forbids.
6. 'Rose up to revel' (vayyaqumu letsacheq) — the verb tsachaq ('to play, to sport') carries sexual overtones in Genesis (26:8; 39:14, 17). The 'reveling' likely includes sexual license alongside the feast. The worship has become orgiastic — covenant celebration inverted into covenant violation.
7. God disowns the people: 'your people whom you brought up' (ammekha asher he'eleita). God says to Moses 'your people,' not 'My people.' The covenant formula ('I will be your God, you will be My people') is rhetorically reversed. The verb shichet ('acted corruptly') echoes the pre-flood corruption (Genesis 6:11-12) — the same word that triggered the flood now describes the golden calf.
8. God quotes the people's own words back to Moses: 'These are your gods, O Israel.' The divine anger is rooted in the specific violation of the specific commands just given. 'Turned aside quickly' (saru maher) — the speed of apostasy is emphasized. Forty days was enough to abandon everything.
9. 'A stiff-necked people' (am-qesheh-oref) — literally 'hard of neck,' like an ox that refuses the yoke. The metaphor comes from agriculture: a stiff-necked animal cannot be guided. Israel resists God's direction the way a stubborn beast resists its driver.
10. 'Leave Me alone' (hannichah li) — God asks Moses to step aside so that divine wrath can proceed unchecked. The request implies that Moses's presence restrains God's judgment. 'I will make you into a great nation' — echoing the Abrahamic promise (Genesis 12:2), God offers Moses a fresh start, bypassing Israel entirely. The test is whether Moses will accept personal greatness at the cost of the people.
11. Moses refuses the offer and intercedes. He reframes the crisis: these are not 'my people' but 'Your people, whom You brought out.' Moses reverses God's disowning language — insisting that God's ownership and God's action define Israel's identity. The intercession is not a polite request but a theological argument.

12. Moses appeals to God's reputation among the nations: what will Egypt say? The argument is not self-interested but God-centered: Your name is at stake. If You destroy Israel, the world will conclude that You saved them only to slaughter them. Divine honor requires divine mercy.
13. Moses quotes God back to God — invoking the oaths to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob's covenant name is used deliberately). The argument reaches its climax: You swore by Yourself (because there is no one greater to swear by, cf. Genesis 22:16). Your oath is irrevocable. Your character is the guarantee.
14. 'The LORD relented' (vayyinnachem YHWH) — the verb nacham means 'to relent, to change course, to be moved to compassion.' The same verb described God's grief before the flood (Genesis 6:6). Moses's intercession changes the outcome — not because God was wrong but because intercession is the divinely appointed means by which mercy operates. Prayer works.
15. The two tablets descend with Moses — 'written on both sides,' front and back. The writing covers every available surface, suggesting the comprehensiveness of God's words. The tablets are about to be shattered.
16. 'The work of God... the writing of God' (ma'aseh Elohim... mikhtav Elohim) — the tablets are divine artifacts: God made them and God wrote on them. What Moses is about to destroy is not human craftsmanship but divine handiwork. The shattering of the tablets is the visible rupture of the covenant.
17. Joshua, waiting below the summit (cf. 24:13), hears the noise first and misidentifies it as warfare. His military instinct reads chaos as combat.
18. Moses, with prophetic discernment, identifies the sound: not victory, not defeat, but singing. The word annot ('singing, responding') may refer to antiphonal worship — the people are singing in liturgical response around the calf. Worship in the wrong direction sounds like celebration.
19. Moses shatters the tablets 'at the foot of the mountain' (tachat hahar) — the location is significant. The covenant given at the mountain's top is broken at its base. The physical destruction enacts the spiritual reality: the covenant is ruptured. Moses's anger mirrors God's anger (v10), but Moses acts where God relented.
20. Moses destroys the calf systematically: burns it (fire), grinds it (powder), scatters it on water, forces the people to drink. The idol is consumed by the very people who worshipped it — they ingest their own sin. The act may echo the ordeal of the suspected adulteress (Numbers 5:24), and Israel has committed spiritual adultery.
21. Moses confronts Aaron directly: 'What did this people do to you?' The question implies that the people forced Aaron — giving him an opportunity to explain. But Aaron's answer (vv22-24) reveals cowardice, not coercion.
22. Aaron deflects blame to the people — 'you know this people, that they are set on evil.' The man charged with intercession between God and Israel now blames the people he was supposed to lead.
23. Aaron's retelling of the people's demand (cf. v1) is accurate in content but evasive in tone. He presents himself as passively responding to irresistible pressure.
24. 'I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf' — Aaron's excuse is perhaps the most transparently dishonest statement in the Pentateuch. Verse 4 says he fashioned it with an engraving tool. Now he claims it spontaneously emerged from the fire. The absurdity is the point: sin produces absurd explanations.
25. 'The people had broken loose' (para, 'to let loose, to make unrestrained') — the word describes hair unbound or a people without discipline. Aaron 'let them break loose' — his failure is leadership abdication. The derision (shimtsah) of enemies is noted: Israel's internal collapse becomes external shame.
26. 'Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!' (mi laYHWH elai) — Moses draws the line of allegiance. The Levites respond — the same tribe from which Moses and Aaron come. The crisis sorts Israel into those who stand with God and those who do not.
27. The command to kill is severe and devastating — brothers, companions, neighbors. The violence is intra-communal punishment for covenant violation. The sword judgment within Israel parallels the tenth plague's judgment within Egypt: covenant-breaking carries the same consequence as oppression.
28. 'About three thousand' — the number represents a significant but limited judgment. The total population was vastly larger. The punishment is severe but not total — mercy limits the scope of justice.
29. The Levites' willingness to execute judgment at personal cost — killing their own kin — becomes their ordination. The verb 'ordained' (mil'u yedkhem, 'fill your hand') is the same term used for priestly consecration (29:9). Loyalty to God above family becomes the Levites' defining qualification for service.
30. 'Perhaps I can make atonement' (ulai akkapperah be'ad chattatkhem) — the verb kaphar ('make atonement, cover') appears in Moses's own mouth. He is not certain he can succeed ('perhaps'), but he will try. Moses becomes the atoning intercessor — offering himself as the covering for Israel's sin.
31. Moses's prayer is raw and unfinished: 'If You will forgive their sin —' The sentence breaks off. The dash (indicated by the Hebrew punctuation) is a gap where words fail. Moses cannot complete the conditional because the alternative is too terrible to speak.
32. 'Blot me out of the book that You have written' (mecheini na misifrekha asher katavta) — Moses offers his own life in exchange for Israel's forgiveness. He would rather be erased from God's record than survive while Israel perishes. This is the most extreme act of intercession in the Hebrew Bible — the mediator offering himself as substitute.

33. God's reply is both merciful and just: He will not accept Moses as substitute ('whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot out'), but He will not destroy Israel entirely. Justice is individual ('whoever has sinned'), not corporate annihilation.
34. 'My angel will go before you' — God will guide Israel but hints at diminished presence. The angel replaces the direct, personal leading of the pillar (cf. 33:2-3). The full consequences of the sin will come 'on the day when I visit' (uvyom poqdi) — deferred judgment, not canceled judgment.
35. The chapter closes with a summary plague — God strikes the people for the calf Aaron made. The narrator names Aaron's responsibility one final time. The chapter that opened with the people's demand for gods closes with God's judgment on those who answered that demand.

33

Summary: God offers to send Israel to the promised land but withdraws His personal presence — 'I will not go up among you, lest I consume you.' The people mourn. Moses meets God in the tent of meeting, asks to know God's ways, and makes the extraordinary request 'Show me Your glory.' God agrees to pass His goodness before Moses but shields him in the cleft of a rock.

What Makes This Remarkable: The most devastating sentence in the post-golden-calf narrative is 'I will not go up among you' (v3) — God offers land without presence. Distance is mercy, not abandonment, but it is still loss. Moses's response redefines the stakes: 'If Your presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here' (v15). Land without God is not the promised land. The request 'Show me Your glory' (har'eni na et-kevodekha, v18) is the boldest human petition in Scripture, and God's response — 'I will make all My goodness pass before you' (v19) — redefines glory as goodness.

Translation Friction: We rendered 'I will not go up among you' (lo e'eleh beqirbekha, v3) in its stark literalness to preserve the shock. The phrase panim el-panim ('face to face,' v11) describing God's conversation with Moses posed tension with v20 ('you cannot see My face and live'); we rendered both literally, as the Hebrew holds both together without resolving the paradox. The cleft of the rock (niqrat hatsur, v22) we rendered literally — the image of God shielding Moses with His hand while passing by defies illustration but conveys real theology.

Connections: Moses in the rock-cleft anticipates Elijah's encounter at Horeb (1 Kings 19:9-13). The 'face to face' language echoes Numbers 12:8 and Deuteronomy 34:10. God's refusal to let Moses see His face connects to John 1:18 ('No one has ever seen God'). The tent of meeting outside the camp (v7) prefigures the tabernacle's mediating function.

¹The LORD said to Moses, "Go up from here, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, "To your offspring I will give it." ²I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey — but I will not go up among you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way." ⁴When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If for a single moment I were to go up among you, I would consume you. Now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'" ⁶So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. ⁷Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. Everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and watch Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. ¹⁰When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. ¹¹The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. ¹²Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in My eyes.'" ¹³Now if I have found favor in Your eyes, please show me Your ways, that I may know You and find favor in Your eyes.

Consider too that this nation is Your people." ¹⁴He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵Moses said to Him, "If Your presence will not go with us, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we are distinct — I and Your people — from every other people on the face of the earth?" ¹⁷The LORD said to Moses, "I will do this very thing that you have spoken, for you have found favor in My eyes, and I know you by name." ¹⁸Moses said, "Please, show me Your glory." ¹⁹He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion to whom I will show compassion. ²⁰But He said, "you cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live." ²¹The LORD said, "There is a place near Me where you shall stand on the rock. ²²When My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. God repeats the land promise but distances Himself from the journey. 'You and the people you brought up' — again, God uses 'you brought,' not 'I brought.' The disowning language from 32:7 continues. The promise of land survives, but the promise of presence is withdrawn.
2. An angel will go instead of God Himself. This is diminished presence — guidance without intimacy. The angel can drive out enemies but cannot replace the direct fellowship Israel experienced at Sinai.
3. 'I will not go up among you' (ki lo e'eleh beqirbekha) — the most devastating sentence in the post-golden-calf narrative. God offers land without presence. The reason is protective: God's holiness would destroy the stiff-necked people en route. Distance is mercy, not abandonment — but it is still loss.
4. 'This disastrous word' (haddavar hara hazzeh) — the people recognize the catastrophe. Mourning and stripping off ornaments are signs of grief and repentance. The gold they stripped off to make the calf is now stripped off in remorse.
5. God's demand to remove ornaments serves a dual purpose: it is penitential (acknowledging sin) and diagnostic ('that I may know what to do with you'). God presents Himself as deliberating — the outcome is not yet final. The stiff-necked people have a window for repentance.
6. 'From Mount Horeb onward' (mehar Chorev) — the ornament removal is permanent, not temporary. Israel leaves Sinai marked by the absence of the adornment they misused. The gold that should have built the tabernacle is now gone.
7. The tent of meeting (ohel mo'ed) is pitched outside the camp — a provisional arrangement reflecting the fractured relationship. God will not dwell inside the camp after the golden calf. Anyone seeking the LORD must go outside — the journey to God now requires physical distance from the community that sinned.
8. The people watch Moses walk to the tent — standing at their own tent doors, they observe the mediator crossing the gap between camp and presence. The watching is reverent and anxious: will God speak? Will the relationship survive?
9. The pillar of cloud descends when Moses enters — visible confirmation that God still meets with the mediator, even if He has withdrawn from the camp. The cloud at the tent entrance is the Shekhinah in diminished form: localized to one tent, accessible to one man.
10. The people worship from a distance — each at his own tent entrance. They can see the cloud but cannot approach it. The worship is real but remote, separated by the gap the golden calf created.
11. 'Face to face, as a man speaks to his friend' (panim el-panim ka'asher yedabber ish el-re'ehu) — the most intimate description of divine-human communication in the Bible. Moses and God speak as friends. The word re'a ('friend, companion') implies mutual regard and trust. This verse will be qualified by v20 ('you cannot see My face'), creating a productive tension: Moses knows God face-to-face yet cannot see God's face fully. Intimacy is real but not unlimited.
12. Moses presses for clarity: who will accompany them? God's promise of an angel (v2) is insufficient. Moses wants to know God's ways (derakhekha), not just God's commands. The request is for deeper relationship, not merely better instructions.
13. 'Show me Your ways, that I may know You' (hodi'eni na et-derakhekha ve'eda'akha) — the verb yada ('know') is the deepest relational knowledge in Hebrew — intimate, personal, experiential. Moses wants not information about God but encounter with God. 'Consider that this nation is Your people' — Moses insists on God's ownership again: they are Yours, not mine.
14. 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest' (panai yelekhu vahanichoti lakh) — God's panai ('My face/presence') will go. The crisis of v3 ('I will not go among you') is reversed. Moses's intercession has restored divine presence. The verb nuach ('give rest') echoes Noah's name and the Sabbath rest — God will bring Israel to the place of completed rest.
15. Moses tests the promise: 'If Your presence will not go, do not bring us up.' The land without God's presence is worthless. Moses would rather stay in the wilderness with God than enter the promised land without Him. This is the deepest statement of covenant priority in the Torah: presence over prosperity, relationship over real estate.

16. 'Is it not by Your going with us, so that we are distinct?' (halo belekhtekha immanu venifleinu) — the verb palah ('be distinct, be set apart') returns from the plague narrative (8:18; 9:4; 11:7). What distinguishes Israel from every other nation is not their law, their land, or their lineage — it is God's presence among them. Without the Shekhinah, Israel is just another people.
17. God grants Moses's request in full: 'I will do this very thing.' The intercession succeeds not because Moses is eloquent but because God has chosen to be accessible to prayer. 'I know you by name' (va'eda'akha beshem) — God's knowledge of Moses is personal, not categorical. The same verb (yada) Moses used in v13 ('that I may know You') is now applied by God to Moses. The knowing is mutual.
18. 'Show me Your glory' (har'eni na et-kevodekha) — the climactic request. Moses has secured God's presence for the journey; now he asks for more. He wants to see the kavod — the full, weighty, tangible reality of God. This is the most audacious prayer in the Hebrew Bible.
19. God's answer is layered: He will show His goodness (tuv), proclaim His name, and declare His sovereign freedom ('I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious'). The formula of sovereign mercy (channoti et-asher achon verichamti et-asher arachem) establishes that God's grace is not compelled but freely given. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:15.
20. 'You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live' (lo tukhal lir'ot et-panai ki lo-yir'ani ha'adam vachai) — the limitation is not arbitrary but protective. The full, unfiltered reality of God (His panim, His kavod) would overwhelm and destroy any created being. Moses can experience God's goodness, hear God's name, and see God's back — but not the unmediated face. The face remains beyond mortal capacity.
21. 'A place near Me' (makom itti) — God provides a location for the encounter. The word makom ('place') is the same word that will become a rabbinic name for God Himself (HaMakom). God creates the conditions under which Moses can survive the encounter.
22. 'I will put you in a cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand' (vesamtikha beniqrat hatsur vesakoti khappi alekha) — God shields Moses in the rock (tsur, which is also a divine title) and covers him with His hand (kaf). The imagery is profoundly tender: God hides Moses to protect him, then passes by. The divine hand both conceals and shelters.
23. 'You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen' (vera'ita et-achorai ufanai lo yera'u) — Moses sees where God has been (achor, 'the back, what follows, the aftermath') but not where God is going (panim, 'the face, the front, the presence'). The back of God is what God leaves behind — the trace, the aftereffect, the residue of glory. This is how all mortals know God: not by looking at Him directly but by seeing what His presence has produced.

34

Summary: *Moses cuts new tablets and ascends Sinai alone. God passes before him, proclaiming His name and character: 'Compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love and truth.' The covenant is renewed with warnings against idolatry. Moses descends with his face shining.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The divine self-proclamation of vv6-7 is the theological center of the entire Old Testament — the most cited passage within the Hebrew Bible itself. God defines His own character not by power but by compassion, grace, patience, chesed ('faithful love'), and emet ('truth/faithfulness'). The arithmetic of mercy versus judgment is explicit: visiting iniquity to three or four generations, but extending chesed to thousands. Moses's shining face (qaran, v29 — from qeren, 'horn/ray') is so extraordinary that he must wear a veil when speaking to the people. The renewed covenant demonstrates that God's commitment survives Israel's worst failure.*

Translation Friction: *The divine attributes of v6-7 required our most careful rendering. We chose 'compassionate' for rachum (from rechem, 'womb'), 'gracious' for channun, 'slow to anger' for erekh appayim (literally 'long of nostrils'), and 'abounding in faithful love and truth' for rav-chesed ve'emet. The verb qaran ('shone,' v29) literally means 'sent out horns/rays'; the Vulgate's mistranslation as 'horned' produced centuries of art showing Moses with horns. We rendered it as 'shone' with the etymology noted. The phrase nose avon vafesha vechata'ah ('forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin,' v7) lists three distinct categories of wrongdoing; we preserved all three.*

Connections: *The divine self-proclamation is echoed in Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; and Nahum 1:3. Moses's shining face is cited in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18, where Paul contrasts the fading glory with the permanent glory in Christ. The renewed tablets demonstrate the pattern of covenant failure and restoration that structures the entire biblical narrative.*

1The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered. 2Be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and

present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. ³No one shall come up with you, and no one shall be seen anywhere on the mountain. Even the flocks and herds shall not graze before that mountain." ⁴So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. ⁵The LORD came down in the cloud, stood there with him, and proclaimed His own name — the LORD. ⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: "The LORD, the LORD, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation." ⁸Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped. ⁹He said, "If now I have found favor in Your eyes, O Lord, please let the Lord go in our midst. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." ¹⁰He said, "I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do wonders that have not been done in all the earth or in any nation. All the people among whom you live shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. ¹¹"Observe what I command you this day. I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ¹²Take care that you do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, lest it become a snare in your midst. ¹³You shall tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherah poles. ¹⁴You must not bow down to any other god, because the LORD, whose very name is Jealous, is a God who demands exclusive devotion. ¹⁵Take care that you do not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, lest when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone invite you and you eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶and you take some of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters prostitute themselves to their gods and make your sons prostitute themselves to their gods. ¹⁷You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. ¹⁸"You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in the month of Aviv you came out of Egypt. ¹⁹Every firstborn that opens the womb is Mine, including every male firstborn among your livestock, whether ox or sheep. ²⁰The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, and if you do not redeem it, you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. No one shall appear before Me empty-handed. ²¹Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. Even in plowing season and in harvest you shall rest. ²²You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. ²³Three times in the year every male among you shall appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. ²⁴For I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your borders, and no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year. ²⁵You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with anything leavened, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until the morning. ²⁶The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk." ²⁷The LORD said to Moses, "Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." ²⁸He was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Words. ²⁹When Moses came down from Mount Sinai — the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses's hand as he came down from the mountain — Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been speaking with God. ³⁰Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, and the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. ³²Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken to him on Mount Sinai. ³³When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. ³⁴Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would remove the veil until he came out. When he came out and told the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, ³⁵the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses's face was shining. Then Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. God commands replacement tablets — the covenant is renewed, not abandoned. Moses must cut the stone ('cut for yourself'), but God will write the words. Human preparation meets divine inscription. The shattered tablets are not erased from history; they are replaced.
2. Morning preparation — the same early-morning obedience pattern seen throughout Moses's ministry (cf. 24:4; 32:6; 34:4). The encounter with God requires both readiness and solitude.
3. Total isolation — not even animals may be present on the mountain. The renewed encounter demands even stricter boundaries than the first Sinai theophany (ch19). The severity reflects the increased stakes: this is covenant restoration after catastrophic breach.
4. Moses obeys exactly — cutting stone, rising early, ascending, carrying the tablets. The simple sequence of verbs (cut, rose, went up, took) mirrors the obedience formulas that characterize faithful response throughout the Torah.
5. 'The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there' (vayyered YHWH be'an'an vayyiyatsev immo sham) — God comes down to Moses's level. The verb yatsav ('stood, stationed') implies deliberate positioning: God plants Himself beside Moses. 'He proclaimed the name of the LORD' (vayyiqra veshem YHWH) — God Himself speaks His own name aloud. This is the ultimate self-revelation: God interpreting God.
6. This is the most important theological statement in the Hebrew Bible. God defines Himself in thirteen attributes (according to rabbinic counting): YHWH, YHWH (the name repeated), El (God), rachum (compassionate), chanun (gracious), erekh appayim (slow to anger), rav-chesed (abounding in steadfast love), emet (faithfulness/truth). The self-revelation begins with mercy and moves to justice. Compassion precedes judgment. This verse is quoted or echoed more than any other verse in the Old Testament by Old Testament authors (Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3; Psalms 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Nehemiah 9:17; 2 Chronicles 30:9).
7. The self-revelation continues: 'keeping steadfast love for thousands' (notser chesed la'alafim) — chesed is God's default posture, extended to thousands of generations. 'Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin' (nose avon vafesha vechata'ah) — the three Hebrew words for wrongdoing are listed comprehensively: avon (guilt/crookedness), pasha (rebellion/transgression), and chata'ah (sin/missing the mark). God forgives all categories of human failure. 'Yet who will by no means clear the guilty' (venaqeh lo yenaqqeh) — justice is not abolished by mercy. The guilty are not automatically acquitted. The tension between mercy (v6) and justice (v7) defines the character of God throughout Scripture.
8. Moses's response is immediate worship — bowing to the earth (vayyiqqod... vayyishtachu). The self-revelation of God's character produces prostration, not theological discussion. The proper response to God's self-definition is not analysis but adoration.
9. Moses immediately applies the revelation: since God is compassionate and forgiving (vv6-7), Moses asks Him to come among the stiff-necked people. The golden calf proved Israel's stubbornness; God's self-description proves His capacity to endure it. Moses's argument: Your character (just revealed) is precisely what this people needs. 'Take us as Your inheritance' (unchalttanu) — the verb nachal means to inherit, to take possession of. Moses asks God to claim Israel as His own property.
10. God responds with covenant renewal: 'I am making a covenant' (hineh anokhi koret berit). The verb karat ('cutting') restarts the covenant process. The wonders (nifla'ot) promised will be unprecedented — not replications of the exodus plagues but new acts of divine power. The covenant is not merely restored but advanced.
11. The covenant stipulations that follow (vv11-26) parallel the Book of the Covenant (ch21-23) in compressed form. The core concerns: exclusive worship, no foreign covenants, festival observance, firstborn dedication, Sabbath rest.
12. 'A snare in your midst' (lemoqesh beqirbekha) — the trap metaphor recurs (cf. 23:33). Foreign covenants create religious obligations that compromise loyalty to YHWH.
13. Three types of Canaanite worship installations are to be destroyed: altars (mizbechot), sacred pillars (matstsebot), and Asherah poles (asherim). The physical infrastructure of competing worship must be demolished.
14. 'The LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God' (YHWH Qanna shemo El qanna hu) — God's jealousy (qin'ah) is a name, not merely an attribute. Qanna is who God is — passionately, exclusively committed to His covenant people. The jealousy of God is the emotional intensity of covenant love that will not share its beloved with rivals.
15. The warning against foreign covenants is specific and practical: shared meals lead to shared worship lead to shared marriages lead to shared gods. The progression from hospitality to apostasy is mapped in a single sentence.
16. Intermarriage becomes the vector for religious compromise. The verb zana ('prostitute') describes the spiritual dimension: worshipping other gods is marital betrayal of the covenant relationship with YHWH.
17. 'Gods of cast metal' (elohei massekha) — a direct reference to the golden calf (32:4, egel massekha). The prohibition specifically targets the kind of idolatry Israel just committed.
18. The festival calendar restated: Unleavened Bread in the month of Aviv. The repetition of established law within the renewed covenant signals continuity — the golden calf did not erase the prior legislation.
19. Firstborn dedication restated — every firstborn belongs to God, both human and animal. The principle from 13:2, 12 is reaffirmed in the covenant renewal.

20. Redemption of donkey firstborn and human firstborn — the same provisions as 13:13. 'No one shall appear before Me empty-handed' — worship requires offering; encounter requires gift.
21. Sabbath rest — even during the critical seasons of plowing and harvest, when economic pressure is greatest, the Sabbath stands. The command 'even in plowing season and in harvest you shall rest' addresses the most tempting exceptions and forbids them.
22. Feast of Weeks (Shavuot) and Feast of Ingathering (Sukkot) — the second and third pilgrimage festivals, completing the annual calendar first established in 23:14-17.
23. Three annual pilgrimages — all males before the Lord GOD. The requirement is unchanged from 23:17.
24. God provides security during the pilgrimage periods: 'no one shall covet your land.' The promise addresses the practical objection: if all men leave for the festival, who protects the territory? God Himself guarantees border security during worship. Obedience is not impractical; God covers the risk.
25. Sacrificial regulations: no leaven with blood offerings, no Passover leftovers until morning. The same rules from 12:10 and 23:18.
26. Firstfruits to God's house and the prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother's milk — the same closure as 23:19. The covenant renewal restates the same boundaries.
27. 'Write these words' (ketov lekha et-haddevarim ha'elleh) — Moses is commanded to write. 'In accordance with these words I have made a covenant' (ki al-pi haddevarim ha'elleh karati ittekha berit) — the written words are the basis of the covenant. The covenant is a textual reality — its terms are recorded, not merely spoken.
28. 'Forty days and forty nights' — the same duration as the first ascent (24:18). Moses fasts completely: no bread, no water. The physical impossibility underscores divine sustenance — God Himself keeps Moses alive during this period. 'The Ten Words' (aseret haddevarim) — the formal Hebrew name for the Ten Commandments. Devarim means 'words,' not 'commandments.' These are God's words, not merely God's rules.
29. 'The skin of his face shone' (qaran or panav) — the verb qaran is related to qeren ('horn, ray'). Moses's face literally radiates — it emits light from having been in God's presence. The shining is involuntary and unconscious ('Moses did not know'). Prolonged exposure to God's kavod leaves a visible residue. The Vulgate's translation of qaran as 'was horned' (cornuta) led to centuries of artistic depictions of Moses with horns.
30. The people are afraid of Moses's radiant face — the reflected glory is too much for them. The irony is poignant: Israel could not bear to hear God's voice (20:19) and now cannot bear to see God's reflection on Moses's face. The mediator carries glory that the people cannot directly endure.
31. Moses must call them back — they have retreated in fear. Aaron and the leaders approach first, then the people follow. The chain of communication mirrors Sinai: God Moses leaders people.
32. Moses transmits the renewed covenant commands to all Israel. The content of vv11-26 is delivered to the community.
33. The veil (masveh) covers Moses's face after he finishes speaking. The veil is not worn during communication with God (v34) or during communication with Israel (v32-33a), but afterward — when the message has been delivered and Moses returns to ordinary life. Paul interprets this veil in 2 Corinthians 3:13-18.
34. Moses removes the veil when speaking with God and when speaking to Israel — transparency in both directions. The veil goes on only after the message is delivered, when Moses is neither in divine encounter nor in prophetic proclamation.
35. The pattern becomes permanent: enter God's presence (veil off), emerge radiant, speak to Israel (veil off), put the veil on. The cycle of revelation and veiling structures Moses's ongoing ministry for the rest of his life.

35

Summary: Moses reassembles all Israel after the golden calf crisis, reaffirms the Sabbath (including the fire prohibition), and calls for voluntary contributions and skilled workers for the tabernacle. The people respond with overwhelming generosity, bringing materials until there is more than enough.

What Makes This Remarkable: The Sabbath instruction comes before the tabernacle construction call, establishing that even sacred work must yield to sacred rest — the death penalty for Sabbath violation (v2) underscores that no human project, however holy, supersedes God's rhythm. The verb qahal ('assemble,' v1) signals a formal covenant gathering, reconstituting the community after the catastrophic breach of chapter 32. The generosity described here contrasts sharply with the golden calf episode: the same people who stripped off gold for an idol now bring gold, silver, and fabric for God's dwelling.

Translation Friction: The fire prohibition on Sabbath (lo-teva'aru esh, v3) appears only here in the Pentateuch. We rendered it directly — 'Do not light a fire anywhere in your dwellings on the Sabbath day' — without interpreting whether it extends to all use of fire or only to construction-related fire. The phrase kol-nediv libbo ('everyone whose heart was willing,' v5) we rendered to emphasize that the tabernacle offering is voluntary generosity, not compulsory taxation, matching the terumah language of 25:2.

Connections: The Sabbath-before-tabernacle sequence parallels the Sabbath-after-creation pattern of Genesis 2:1-3. The overwhelming generosity (36:5-7) reverses the golden calf's perversion of resources. The skilled women spinning (v25-26) anticipate the 'woman of valor' in Proverbs 31:19. The voluntary offering model shapes later temple contributions (1 Chronicles 29:6-9; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

¹Moses assembled the entire Israelite community and told them, "These are the things the LORD has commanded you to do. ²Work may be done for six days, but the seventh day is to be a holy day for you — a complete sabbath of rest dedicated to the LORD. Anyone who does any work on that day must be put to death. ³Do not light a fire anywhere in your dwellings on the Sabbath day. ⁴Moses addressed the entire Israelite community: "This is what the LORD has commanded: ⁵Take from your possessions a contribution for the LORD. Let everyone whose heart is willing bring an offering to the LORD: gold, silver, and bronze, ⁶blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, fine linen, and goat hair, ⁷ram skins dyed red, fine leather, and acacia wood, ⁸oil for the lampstand, spices for the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, ⁹onyx stones, and gemstones for mounting on the ephod and the breastpiece. ¹⁰Let all the skilled among you come and produce everything the LORD has commanded: ¹¹the tabernacle with its tent, its covering, its clasps, its frames, its crossbars, its posts, and its bases; ¹²the ark with its poles, the mercy seat, and the screening curtain; ¹³the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; ¹⁴the lampstand for illumination with its equipment, its lamps, and the oil for light; ¹⁵the incense altar with its poles, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the entrance screen at the tabernacle doorway; ¹⁶the altar for burnt offerings with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its equipment; the basin with its stand; ¹⁷the curtains of the courtyard with their posts and bases, and the screen for the courtyard entrance; ¹⁸the tent pegs for the tabernacle, the tent pegs for the courtyard, and their ropes; ¹⁹the woven garments for service in the sanctuary — the sacred garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments for his sons to serve as priests." ²⁰The entire Israelite community then withdrew from Moses's presence. ²¹Everyone whose heart moved them and whose spirit stirred them came forward, bringing their contribution to the LORD for constructing the tent of meeting, for all its service, and for the sacred garments. ²²Men and women alike came — all who were generous of heart — bringing brooches, earrings, rings, and ornaments, every kind of gold jewelry. Each one who presented a wave offering of gold gave it to the LORD. ²³Everyone who had blue, purple, or scarlet yarn, fine linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red, or fine leather brought these materials. ²⁴All who contributed silver or bronze brought their offering to the LORD, and everyone who had acacia wood suitable for any part of the project brought it. ²⁵Every woman skilled in the craft spun with her hands and brought what she had produced — blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. ²⁶All the women whose hearts stirred them with skill spun the goat hair. ²⁷The leaders brought onyx stones and gemstones for mounting on the ephod and the breastpiece, ²⁸along with spices, oil for the lampstand, oil for anointing, and fragrant incense. ²⁹Every Israelite man and woman whose heart prompted them to contribute to the work the LORD had commanded through Moses brought a freewill offering to the LORD. ³⁰Moses told the Israelites, "Take note — the LORD has specifically chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. ³¹He has filled him with the Spirit of God — with wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and every kind of skill, ³²to create artistic designs and to work with gold, silver, and bronze, ³³to cut gemstones for mounting, to carve wood, and to execute every form of artistic craftsmanship. ³⁴He has also given both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. ³⁵He has filled them with skill to carry out every kind of craft — engraving, designing, embroidering with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weaving — performing every kind of work and creating artistic designs."

1. Moses reconvenes all Israel after the golden calf crisis. The verb qahal (assemble) signals a formal covenant gathering — the community must hear God's construction instructions together.
2. Even tabernacle construction — sacred work — must yield to Sabbath rest. The death penalty underscores that no human project, however holy, supersedes God's rhythm of rest.
3. The fire prohibition on Sabbath extends even to basic domestic activity. This instruction appears only here in the Pentateuch, emphasizing Sabbath as total cessation.
4. Moses relays God's instructions for freewill offerings. The phrase 'this is what the LORD has commanded' (zeh ha-davar) frames what follows as divine directive, not human fundraising.
5. The offering (terumah) is voluntary — only from those whose hearts are willing (nediv libo). God funds His dwelling through generous hearts, not taxation.
6. The textile materials — blue (tekhelet), purple (argaman), scarlet (tola'at shani) — are expensive dyes. Fine linen (shesh) and goat hair provide the structural fabrics.
7. Ram skins dyed red and tachash leather (possibly dugong or seal) form the protective outer coverings. Acacia wood provides the structural framework material.
8. Oil, spices, and incense materials serve the lampstand, anointing rituals, and altar of incense — the ongoing worship functions of the tabernacle.
9. Onyx and setting stones are for the ephod shoulder pieces and the breastpiece — the high priest's garments that bear Israel's names before God.
10. The call goes to every 'wise-hearted' person (khakham-lev). Skill in craftsmanship is framed as wisdom — a gift from God, not merely human talent.
11. This begins the comprehensive inventory of tabernacle components. The tabernacle (mishkan) is God's dwelling; the tent (ohel) is its covering structure.
12. The ark houses the covenant tablets; the mercy seat (kapporet) is where God meets His people. The screening curtain (parokhet) separates the Most Holy Place.
13. The table of the Presence holds the twelve loaves representing Israel's tribes — a perpetual offering symbolizing God's sustaining provision.
14. The lampstand (menorah) provides light in the Holy Place. Its oil must be continually supplied — Israel tends the light of God's presence.
15. The incense altar stands before the veil; its fragrant smoke rises as a symbol of prayer. The entrance screen marks the threshold of the Holy Place.
16. The burnt offering altar is the central site of sacrifice in the courtyard. The bronze basin provides water for the priests' ritual purification.
17. The courtyard curtains create the sacred perimeter — the boundary between common space and holy ground where Israel meets God.
18. Tent pegs and ropes are the most mundane components, yet even these are specified. Every detail of God's dwelling, however small, matters.
19. The priestly garments are 'garments of service' (bigdei serad) — clothing designed for sacred function, not personal adornment.
20. The congregation departs to gather their offerings. The gap between instruction and response creates space for genuine voluntary decision.
21. Two phrases describe the givers: 'heart lifted him' (nasa'o libbo) and 'spirit made willing' (nadevah rucho). The offering flows from internal motivation, not external pressure.
22. Both men and women contribute. The jewelry items — brooches, earrings, rings, ornaments — represent personal wealth surrendered for communal sacred purpose.
23. Each person brings what they have. The diversity of materials reflects the diversity of the community, unified in a single construction project.
24. Silver, bronze, and acacia wood complete the structural materials. The emphasis on bringing what was 'found with' each person highlights individual participation.
25. Women's spinning skill is highlighted as a form of wisdom (khokhmat-lev). Their craftsmanship directly produces the tabernacle's textile components.
26. Goat hair spinning for the tent covering requires specific expertise. The women whose hearts 'lifted them in wisdom' volunteer this specialized skill.
27. The leaders (nesi'im) contribute the most costly items — precious stones and gemstones that only they could afford for the ephod and breastpiece.
28. Leaders also supply the spices and oils for ongoing worship — anointing, lampstand, and incense. These consumable materials require continual replenishment.
29. This summary statement emphasizes the freewill character of the offering (nedavah). The entire community — men and women — participates voluntarily.
30. God calls Bezalel 'by name' (be-shem) — a personal divine appointment. His lineage (Uri, Hur, Judah) connects tabernacle artistry to Israel's royal tribe.

31. The Spirit of God fills Bezalel with wisdom (khokhmah), understanding (tevnah), knowledge (da'at), and skill (melakhah). Artisan craft is a spiritual gift.
32. Bezalel's artistic design ability (makhashavot) involves creative thinking — the capacity to envision and execute complex metalwork in gold, silver, and bronze.
33. Stone cutting, wood carving, and artistic craftsmanship complete Bezalel's skill set. He masters every medium the tabernacle requires.
34. God gives Bezalel and Oholiab the ability to teach — their skill is not hoarded but transmitted. Oholiab represents Dan, pairing with Judah in the work.
35. The comprehensive skill list — engraving, designing, embroidering, weaving — covers every textile and decorative art needed for the tabernacle and its garments.

36

Summary: *Bezalel, Oholiab, and the skilled workers begin construction. The people bring so much material that Moses must order them to stop. The craftsmen build the tabernacle curtains, frames, crossbars, and veil exactly as God commanded.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The surplus problem (vv5-7) is unique in Scripture — Moses must restrain giving because there is more than enough (dai lahem vehoter). The people's generosity, arriving 'morning after morning' (boqer baboqer, v3), is an echo of manna-rhythm applied to worship: daily provision, daily offering. The construction narrative closely mirrors the instruction chapters (25-31), creating a literary parallel between divine speech and human obedience — what God said, they did.*

Translation Friction: *The near-verbatim repetition of construction details from chapters 25-31 posed a rendering challenge: we maintained consistency with the instruction-chapter vocabulary to highlight the obedience pattern, while allowing natural variation in English where the Hebrew itself varies. The phrase dai lahem vehoter ('enough and more,' v7) we rendered as 'more than enough,' capturing the emphatic surplus. The shift from 'you shall make' (instruction) to 'they made' (execution) tracks the faithful implementation of the divine blueprint.*

Connections: *The surplus of offerings reverses the golden calf's misuse of resources. The obedience pattern ('as the LORD commanded') echoes the creation account's 'and it was so' (Genesis 1). The craftsmen's faithful execution anticipates the summary refrain of chapter 39 and the completion formula of 40:33. David's temple-fund appeal in 1 Chronicles 29:1-9 follows this model of joyful, abundant giving.*

¹Bezalel, Oholiab, and every person gifted with skill — in whom the LORD had placed wisdom and understanding to know how to carry out all the construction work for the sanctuary — were to do the work exactly as the LORD had commanded. ²Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and every skilled person in whom the LORD had placed wisdom — everyone whose heart moved them to come and undertake the work. ³They received from Moses all the contributions the Israelites had brought for the sanctuary construction project. Meanwhile the people continued bringing additional freewill offerings every morning. ⁴All the skilled workers who were carrying out the sanctuary construction left their various tasks ⁵and reported to Moses, "The people are bringing far more than is needed for the work the LORD has commanded." ⁶So Moses issued an order, and a proclamation was circulated throughout the camp: "No man or woman should prepare any more material for the sacred contribution." The people were thus prevented from bringing more. ⁷The materials already on hand were more than sufficient to complete all the work — there was even a surplus. ⁸All the skilled workers among those doing the construction made the tabernacle with ten panels of finely twisted linen and blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled designer. ⁹Each panel measured twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide; all the panels were identical in size. ¹⁰He joined five of the panels to one another, and likewise joined the other five panels to one another. ¹¹He made loops of blue yarn along the edge of the outermost panel in the first set, and did the same along the edge of the outermost panel in the second set. ¹²He made fifty loops on the first panel and fifty loops on the corresponding edge of the panel in the second set, with the loops positioned directly opposite one another. ¹³He fashioned fifty gold clasps and used them to join

the panels together, so that the tabernacle formed a single unit. ¹⁴He made panels of goat hair for a tent covering over the tabernacle — eleven panels in all. ¹⁵Each panel measured thirty cubits long and four cubits wide; all eleven panels were the same size. ¹⁶He joined five panels into one section and the other six into a separate section. ¹⁷He attached fifty loops along the edge of the outermost panel in the first section, and fifty loops along the edge of the connecting panel of the second section. ¹⁸He fashioned fifty bronze clasps to join the tent covering together into a single unit. ¹⁹He made a covering for the tent from ram skins dyed red, with an additional covering of fine leather over that. ²⁰He constructed the upright frames for the tabernacle from acacia wood. ²¹Each frame was ten cubits tall and a cubit and a half wide. ²²Each frame had two tenons parallel to each other; he made all the frames of the tabernacle this way. ²³He made twenty frames for the south side of the tabernacle, ²⁴with forty silver bases beneath them — two bases under each frame to support its two tenons. ²⁵For the opposite side of the tabernacle, the north side, he made twenty frames ²⁶with their forty silver bases — two bases under each frame. ²⁷For the rear of the tabernacle, on the west, he made six frames. ²⁸He made two additional frames for the corners at the rear of the tabernacle. ²⁹These were joined at the bottom and connected all the way to the top with a single ring. He did this for both corner frames. ³⁰So there were eight frames with their sixteen silver bases — two bases beneath each frame. ³¹He made crossbars of acacia wood — five for the frames on one side of the tabernacle, ³²five for the frames on the other side, and five for the frames at the rear, facing west. ³³He crafted the center crossbar to run through the middle of the frames from one end to the other. ³⁴He overlaid the frames with gold, made their rings of gold as holders for the crossbars, and overlaid the crossbars with gold as well. ³⁵He made the inner curtain of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled designer. ³⁶For it he made four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold, with gold hooks, and cast four silver bases for them. ³⁷He crafted a screen for the tent entrance from blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, done in embroidered work, ³⁸along with its five posts and their hooks. He overlaid their tops and connecting bands with gold, and their five bases were bronze.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The construction team includes not only Bezalel and Oholiab but every skilled person whom God equipped. Sacred construction is communal craftsmanship guided by divine wisdom.
2. Moses summons the workers personally. The phrase 'whose heart stirred him to approach the work' emphasizes that even God-gifted artisans must voluntarily engage.
3. A remarkable detail: the people keep bringing offerings every morning (boqer baboqer) even after work has begun. Generosity continues beyond the initial call.
4. The craftsmen interrupt their own work to report the surplus — a sign of honest stewardship. They prioritize accuracy over accumulation.
5. An extraordinary situation: too much generosity. The people's offerings exceed what the work requires — a sharp contrast to reluctant giving.
6. Moses must formally restrain the people from giving more. This is the only time in Scripture a leader must halt contributions for being excessive.
7. The materials were 'sufficient and more' (dayam... ve-hoter). God's dwelling is funded entirely by willing hearts, with abundance left over.
8. The ten inner panels form the tabernacle proper. Cherubim woven into the fabric echo the heavenly throne room — the tabernacle as earthly mirror of God's heavenly dwelling.
9. Precise dimensions ensure uniformity. Twenty-eight by four cubits per panel — standardization enables the panels to join into a seamless whole.
10. Two sets of five panels each are joined, then the two sets connected — a modular construction approach allowing assembly and disassembly for travel.
11. Blue loops along the panel edges create the attachment points. Blue (tekhelet) connotes heaven — even structural details carry symbolic weight.
12. Fifty loops per set, perfectly aligned opposite each other. Precision in these structural details ensures the tabernacle holds together as one unit.
13. Fifty gold clasps unite the two halves into one tabernacle (mishkan echad). Gold connotes the divine presence that dwells within this unified structure.
14. The goat-hair tent covering provides a protective layer over the inner linen panels. Eleven panels (one more than the inner set) ensure full coverage.
15. Slightly larger dimensions (thirty cubits vs. twenty-eight) allow the outer covering to drape over and protect the finer inner panels.

16. The asymmetric grouping (five plus six) allows the extra panel to fold over the front of the tabernacle entrance.
17. Construction of the joining mechanism for the outer tent covering mirrors the inner panels but uses different materials — function dictates form.
18. Bronze clasps (not gold) join the outer covering — appropriate to the less sacred outer layer. Material grades correspond to degrees of holiness.
19. Ram skins dyed red and fine leather form the outermost protective layers — waterproofing the sacred structure against the elements.
20. The upright frames (qerashim) of acacia wood provide the rigid structure. Acacia is the primary desert hardwood, durable and resistant to decay.
21. Standardized frame dimensions (ten by one-and-a-half cubits) create a modular wall system that can be assembled and transported.
22. Two tenons per frame lock into silver bases, creating stable joints. The word meshullavot (joined) indicates the tenons are parallel and evenly spaced.
23. Twenty frames for the south wall. The directional specificity (negev teimanah) anchors the tabernacle's orientation in Israel's camp layout.
24. Forty silver bases — two per frame — provide the foundation. Silver (from the census tax) literally supports the dwelling, connecting the people to God's house.
25. The north wall mirrors the south with twenty frames, establishing the tabernacle's symmetry. Both long sides are identical in construction.
26. Forty silver bases on the north match the south. The structural symmetry reflects the ordered perfection of God's dwelling design.
27. Six frames for the narrower west (rear) wall. The tabernacle entrance faces east — toward the sunrise, the direction of God's appearing.
28. Corner frames require special construction, reinforcing the structural junction where the side and rear walls meet.
29. The corner frames are twinned (to'amim) from bottom to top, bound to a single ring — creating a rigid corner that holds the walls at right angles.
30. Eight total frames on the west end (six regular plus two corners) with sixteen bases. Every structural element is precisely counted and recorded.
31. Five crossbars per side lock the upright frames together laterally. Acacia wood crossbars prevent the wall from flexing or collapsing.
32. The crossbar pattern repeats: five per side, five for the west — total structural rigidity for a portable building that must survive wilderness travel.
33. The center crossbar runs the entire length of the wall through the middle of the frames — the spine that holds each wall section together.
34. Gold overlay on frames, rings, and crossbars transforms the acacia wood structure into a shining interior. Inside the tabernacle, everything is gold.
35. The inner curtain (parokhet) separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Its cherubim design mirrors the inner panels — heavenly guardians woven into the boundary.
36. Four acacia posts overlaid with gold support the inner curtain. Their silver bases echo the wall foundations — the entire structure rests on silver.
37. The entrance screen differs from the inner curtain: embroidered work (roqem) rather than woven cherubim, marking a lesser degree of sacred separation.
38. Five posts with gold tops but bronze bases. The shift from silver (inner curtain) to bronze (entrance) reflects the gradient of holiness from inside out.

37

Summary: *Bezalel personally constructs the most sacred interior furnishings: the ark of the covenant with its mercy seat and cherubim, the table of the Presence, the golden lampstand, and the incense altar — all overlaid with pure gold.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Bezalel constructs the ark himself — the most sacred object in Israel's worship is made by the hands of the artisan God called 'by name' (31:2). The mercy seat cherubim face each other with wings spread, creating the space where God will meet Moses (25:22). The lampstand is hammered from a single piece of gold (miqshah, v17) — no joining or welding, but one continuous form. The gold zone furnishings (ark, table, lampstand, incense altar) form an ensemble that represents God's throne, God's provision, God's light, and God's fragrance — a complete sensory theology.*

Translation Friction: *The construction account closely follows the instructions of chapter 25. We maintained vocabulary consistency between the two chapters so readers can trace the obedience pattern. The phrase zahav tahor ('pure gold') recurs throughout; we rendered it consistently rather than varying the English. The permanent carrying poles of the ark (v5, cf. 25:15) symbolize readiness to move — we noted this in the original instruction chapter and maintained the connection here.*

Connections: The ark will lead Israel through the Jordan (Joshua 3:3-17), circle Jericho (Joshua 6:4-8), and rest in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:1-9). The mercy seat becomes the focal point of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The lampstand imagery appears in Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1:12-13. The incense altar is the setting for Zechariah's angelic encounter (Luke 1:11).

¹Bezalel constructed the ark from acacia wood — two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half tall. ²He plated it with pure gold inside and out, and fashioned a gold molding around its rim. ³He cast four gold rings for it, placing them at its four feet — two rings on one side and two on the other. ⁴He made carrying poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. ⁵He inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark for transporting it. ⁶He made the mercy seat of pure gold — two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. ⁷He fashioned two cherubim of hammered gold, forming them at the two ends of the mercy seat. ⁸One cherub extended from one end and the other from the opposite end; he made the cherubim as a single piece with the mercy seat at its two ends. ⁹The cherubim had their wings spread upward, overshadowing the mercy seat. They faced each other, with their faces turned down toward the mercy seat. ¹⁰He constructed the table from acacia wood — two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half tall. ¹¹He overlaid it with pure gold and fashioned a gold molding around its rim. ¹²He also made a rim a handbreadth wide around it and placed a gold molding along that rim. ¹³He cast four gold rings for it and attached them at the four corners near its four legs. ¹⁴The rings were positioned close to the rim as holders for the poles used to carry the table. ¹⁵He crafted the carrying poles from acacia wood, overlaid them with gold, and used them for transporting the table. ¹⁶He made the utensils for the table — its plates, ladles, bowls, and pitchers for pouring drink offerings — all from pure gold. ¹⁷He constructed the lampstand of pure gold. He hammered it from a single piece — its base, shaft, cups, buds, and blossoms were all of one piece. ¹⁸Six branches extended from its sides — three branches from one side and three from the other. ¹⁹Three almond-shaped cups with buds and blossoms adorned one branch, and three almond-shaped cups with buds and blossoms on the next — the same pattern for all six branches extending from the lampstand. ²⁰On the lampstand's central shaft were four almond-shaped cups with buds and blossoms. ²¹A bud was positioned beneath each pair of branches — for all six branches extending from the lampstand. ²²The buds and branches were all of one piece with it, the whole lampstand a single work of hammered pure gold. ²³He made its seven lamps, along with its wick trimmers and trays, all of pure gold. ²⁴He used one talent of pure gold for the lampstand and all its accessories. ²⁵He constructed the incense altar from acacia wood — one cubit long, one cubit wide (it was square), and two cubits tall. Its horns were of one piece with it. ²⁶He overlaid it with pure gold — its top, all its sides, and its horns — and made a gold molding around it. ²⁷He made two gold rings beneath the molding on two opposite sides as holders for the poles used to carry it. ²⁸He crafted the carrying poles from acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. ²⁹He also prepared the sacred anointing oil and the pure fragrant incense, blended as a perfumer would.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Bezalel personally constructs the ark — the most sacred object in the tabernacle. Acacia wood overlaid with gold houses the covenant tablets.
2. Pure gold inside and out with a gold molding (zer). The ark's double plating signifies that God's covenant dwelling is precious through and through.
3. Four gold rings at the feet position the carrying poles at the base, keeping the ark stable during transport through the wilderness.
4. Acacia wood poles overlaid with gold — consistent with the ark's materials. The poles remain in the rings permanently (25:15), symbolizing readiness to move.
5. The poles inserted in the rings enable the Levites to carry the ark without touching it directly — maintaining the boundary between human and divine holiness.
6. The mercy seat (kapporet) of pure gold is the lid of the ark and the place where God meets Israel. Its dimensions match the ark exactly.
7. Two cherubim hammered from one piece of gold — not attached separately but formed organically from the mercy seat itself, indicating inseparable unity.
8. The cherubim extend from opposite ends, facing inward. Their positioning creates a throne-like space above the mercy seat where God's presence dwells.

9. Wings spread upward and faces turned downward toward the mercy seat — the cherubim simultaneously guard and attend the place of atonement.
10. The table of the Presence holds the twelve loaves (bread of the Presence) representing Israel's tribes continually before God.
11. Pure gold overlay and gold molding on the table echo the ark's construction — items in the Holy Place reflect the glory within the Most Holy Place.
12. The handbreadth rim (misgereth) prevents items from sliding off during transport. Practical design serves the sacred function.
13. Four gold rings at the corners near the legs — the same carrying mechanism as the ark, enabling reverent transport by poles.
14. Rings positioned near the rim provide balanced carrying points. Every detail of the engineering serves the tabernacle's portable sacred architecture.
15. The carrying poles for the table, like those for the ark, are acacia wood overlaid with gold — maintaining material consistency throughout the Holy Place.
16. The table utensils — plates, ladles, bowls, and pitchers — are pure gold. These serve the bread of the Presence and the drink offerings placed on the table.
17. The lampstand (menorah) is hammered from a single piece of pure gold — no joints or welds. Its organic almond-blossom design suggests a living tree of light.
18. Six branches (three per side) plus the central shaft create seven lamp positions — the number of completion, providing full illumination in the Holy Place.
19. Almond-shaped cups (meshukadim) echo Aaron's rod that budded with almonds (Num 17). The almond motif connects light, life, and priestly authority.
20. Four additional almond cups on the central shaft distinguish it from the branches. The shaft is the trunk; the branches extend from it organically.
21. Decorative buds beneath each pair of branches create visual rhythm. The lampstand's design is both functional (light) and beautiful (artistry).
22. The single-piece construction is emphasized: everything is mimmennah (from it). No part is added — the lampstand grows from one mass of gold.
23. Seven lamps, wick trimmers, and trays — the maintenance tools are pure gold like the lampstand itself. Even the accessories share the sacred material.
24. One talent of pure gold (approximately 75 pounds) for the entire lampstand and all its accessories — a staggering amount of precious metal.
25. The incense altar is small (one cubit square, two cubits tall) but central — it stands directly before the inner curtain, closest to God's presence.
26. Pure gold overlay on every surface including the horns. The gold molding (zer) frames the top, matching the ark's and table's decorative borders.
27. Two gold rings for carrying poles, positioned on opposite sides below the molding. The incense altar, like the ark and table, must be transportable.
28. The carrying poles follow the standard pattern: acacia wood overlaid with gold. Consistency in construction materials unifies the tabernacle's sacred furniture.
29. The anointing oil and incense are prepared by a perfumer's art (roqeach). Sacred scent, like sacred light, fills the space where God dwells.

38

Summary: *The craftsmen build the bronze altar and bronze basin for the courtyard, construct the courtyard enclosure, and provide an inventory of all materials used — gold, silver, and bronze — including the silver from the census ransom of 603,550 men.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The material inventory (vv21-31) is a remarkable accounting document embedded in sacred narrative. The total gold used was about 29 talents (roughly one ton), the silver came from the half-shekel census ransom of 603,550 men, and the bronze was about 70 talents. The precision demonstrates that the tabernacle's construction was publicly accountable — no material disappeared. The bronze basin (v8) was made from the mirrors of the serving women, transforming instruments of personal adornment into instruments of priestly purification.*

Translation Friction: *The women's mirrors (mar'ot hatsov'ot, v8) are described as belonging to 'the women who served at the entrance of the tent of meeting.' The nature of this service is debated; we rendered the phrase literally without specifying the role. The talent and shekel measurements we retained in Hebrew units, providing approximate modern equivalents in notes. The census number 603,550 (v26) matches Numbers 1:46 exactly, anchoring the tabernacle construction to the community's demographic record.*

Connections: The census number matches Numbers 1:46 and 2:32. The bronze basin connects to the priestly washing prescribed in 30:17-21 and anticipates the 'molten sea' in Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:23-26). The women serving at the tent entrance reappear in 1 Samuel 2:22. The material accountability anticipates temple treasury practices in 2 Kings 12:9-16.

¹He built the altar for burnt offerings from acacia wood — five cubits long, five cubits wide (it was square), and three cubits tall. ²He made horns at its four corners as one piece with the altar, and overlaid the whole structure with bronze. ³He produced all the altar's equipment — the pots, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks, and fire pans — fashioning everything from bronze. ⁴He made a bronze mesh grating for the altar, fitting it beneath the ledge so it extended halfway up. ⁵He cast four rings at the four corners of the bronze grating as holders for the carrying poles. ⁶He crafted the carrying poles from acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. ⁷He slid the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar for carrying it. The altar was built hollow, constructed from planks. ⁸He fashioned the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁹He constructed the courtyard. On the south side, the courtyard curtains were of finely twisted linen, spanning one hundred cubits. ¹⁰Their twenty posts and twenty bronze bases had silver hooks and silver bands on the posts. ¹¹On the north side the curtains also spanned one hundred cubits, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases; the hooks and bands on the posts were silver. ¹²On the west side the curtains spanned fifty cubits, supported by ten posts with ten bases; the hooks and bands on the posts were silver. ¹³The east side measured fifty cubits across. ¹⁴Curtains spanning fifteen cubits were on one side of the entrance, supported by three posts and three bases. ¹⁵On the other side of the courtyard entrance — on both sides of the gate — were curtains of fifteen cubits, with three posts and three bases. ¹⁶All the curtains surrounding the courtyard were of finely twisted linen. ¹⁷The bases for the posts were bronze, while the hooks and bands were silver. The post capitals were overlaid with silver, and all the courtyard posts were banded with silver. ¹⁸The screen at the courtyard entrance was embroidered work of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. It was twenty cubits long and five cubits high, matching the courtyard curtains. ¹⁹It had four posts with four bronze bases. Their hooks were silver, and their capitals and bands were overlaid with silver. ²⁰All the tent pegs for the tabernacle and the surrounding courtyard were bronze. ²¹This is the inventory of materials for the tabernacle — the tabernacle of the testimony — recorded at Moses's direction, carried out by the Levites under the supervision of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest. ²²Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, carried out everything the LORD had commanded Moses. ²³Working alongside him was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan — an engraver, a skilled designer, and an embroiderer in blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and fine linen. ²⁴The total gold used in all the sanctuary construction — the gold from the wave offering — amounted to twenty-nine talents and seven hundred thirty shekels by the sanctuary standard. ²⁵The silver collected from those in the community who were counted came to one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels by the sanctuary standard — ²⁶a bekah per person (that is, half a shekel by the sanctuary standard) for everyone who passed through the census, twenty years old or older — totaling 603,550 men. ²⁷The one hundred talents of silver were used to cast the bases for the sanctuary and the bases for the curtain — one hundred bases from one hundred talents, one talent per base. ²⁸From the remaining one thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels, he made hooks for the posts, overlaid their capitals, and fashioned bands for them. ²⁹The bronze from the wave offering totaled seventy talents and two thousand four hundred shekels. ³⁰With this bronze he made the bases for the entrance to the tent of meeting, the bronze altar, its bronze grating, and all the altar's equipment, ³¹along with the bases around the courtyard, the bases for the courtyard entrance, and all the tent pegs for the tabernacle and the surrounding courtyard.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The burnt offering altar, the largest piece of tabernacle furniture, stands in the courtyard. Its square shape and acacia wood construction provide stability.
2. Horns at the four corners are integral (not attached), symbolizing strength and serving as anchor points for sacrificial blood application.
3. The altar's bronze equipment — pots for ashes, shovels, bowls, forks, and fire pans — are the tools of daily sacrificial service.

4. The bronze grating fits inside the altar below the ledge, supporting the fire and allowing ashes to fall through — practical engineering for continual use.
5. Four rings at the grating's corners hold the carrying poles, enabling transport. Even this heavy altar must be portable for wilderness travel.
6. Carrying poles of acacia wood overlaid with bronze (not gold, as for the inner furniture) — materials correspond to the courtyard's lower holiness grade.
7. The hollow plank construction keeps the altar light enough for transport while providing the volume needed for sacrificial fires.
8. The bronze basin is made from women's mirrors — a remarkable detail. Personal vanity items are transformed into instruments of priestly purification.
9. The courtyard dimensions begin: one hundred cubits on the south side. The courtyard creates sacred space separating the tabernacle from the common camp.
10. Twenty posts with bronze bases and silver hooks/bands. The material gradient continues: bronze for structure, silver for fittings, in the courtyard zone.
11. The north side mirrors the south exactly — one hundred cubits, twenty posts, twenty bases. Symmetry in the courtyard reflects divine order.
12. The west side (fifty cubits) with ten posts forms the rear boundary. Smaller dimensions reflect the courtyard's rectangular shape.
13. The east side (entrance side) also measures fifty cubits but includes the gate opening, dividing the curtain space differently.
14. Fifteen cubits of curtains on one side of the entrance, supported by three posts — creating the approach to the courtyard gate.
15. Matching fifteen-cubit curtains on the other side frame the twenty-cubit entrance opening in the center of the east wall.
16. All courtyard curtains are finely twisted linen — white fabric creating a visible boundary of purity around the sacred precinct.
17. The material breakdown: bronze bases, silver hooks and bands, silver-overlaid capitals. Every pillar in the courtyard gleams with silver.
18. The courtyard gate screen is the most decorated element — embroidered with the same blue, purple, and scarlet as the tabernacle entrance, marking it as a sacred threshold.
19. Four posts for the gate (vs. three for each side section). Silver hooks and overlaid capitals mark this entrance as more prominent than the surrounding curtains.
20. All tent pegs are bronze — the most utilitarian items use the most common metal. Even stakes anchoring ropes serve the sacred structure.
21. This inventory (pequdei) transitions from construction narrative to material accounting. Ithamar son of Aaron oversees the Levitical record-keeping.
22. Bezalel's full genealogy reappears at the project's completion, bookending the construction account. He faithfully executed everything God commanded.
23. Oholiab's triple skill set — engraving, design, embroidery — complements Bezalel's work. The two master artisans represent Judah and Dan working together.
24. Twenty-nine talents and 730 shekels of gold — approximately 2,200 pounds. The wave offering (tenufah) gold was ceremonially presented before use.
25. The census silver (one hundred talents plus 1,775 shekels) came from the mandatory half-shekel contribution, not freewill offering.
26. The bekah (half-shekel) per person from 603,550 men connects the tabernacle's foundation literally to every counted Israelite — all share in supporting God's house.
27. One hundred talents of silver cast one hundred bases — one talent per base. The sanctuary and veil rest on silver foundations contributed by all Israel.
28. The remaining silver covers the decorative elements — hooks, capitals, bands. Every shekel is accounted for in this transparent material audit.
29. Seventy talents and 2,400 shekels of bronze — the most abundant metal, used for the heaviest structural components and all courtyard elements.
30. Bronze provides the bases, altar, grating, and vessels — all the elements exposed to weather, fire, and heavy use in the outer courtyard.
31. The inventory closes with the bronze tent pegs — from the most sacred interior furniture down to the humblest structural anchor, everything is accounted for.

39

Summary: *The priestly garments are completed — ephod, breastpiece, robe, tunics, turban, and gold plate. The refrain 'as the LORD commanded Moses' echoes seven times. All the tabernacle work is finished and brought to Moses, who inspects it and blesses the people.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The refrain ka'asher tsivvah YHWH et-Mosheh ('as the LORD commanded Moses') appears seven times in this chapter, deliberately echoing the sevenfold 'and God said' of Genesis 1. The tabernacle construction is presented as a new creation — what God spoke into existence at the cosmic level, He now speaks into existence at the liturgical level. Moses's inspection and blessing (v43) parallel God's inspection and blessing of creation in Genesis 1:31-2:3. The gold thread hammered thin and cut into wire for weaving into the ephod (v3) represents extraordinary technical skill in service of sacred art.*

Translation Friction: *The repetitive structure of the chapter — garment after garment, each followed by the obedience refrain — we preserved without compression, because the repetition itself carries theological meaning: faithful obedience is the point, and each repetition confirms it. The technical weaving vocabulary (hammered gold sheets cut into threads, v3) we rendered as clearly as possible while preserving the craft details. Moses 'saw all the work, and behold, they had done it' (v43) uses the same verb ra'ah ('saw') and the same assessment structure as Genesis 1:31 ('God saw everything He had made').*

Connections: *The sevenfold refrain parallels the seven days of creation (Genesis 1:1-2:3). Moses's inspection and blessing echo God's approval in Genesis 1:31. The presentation of completed work to Moses anticipates the presentation of the completed temple to Solomon (1 Kings 7:51). The priestly garments are finally worn in Leviticus 8 at the ordination ceremony.*

¹From the blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, they produced the woven garments for service in the sanctuary. They also made the sacred garments for Aaron, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²They constructed the ephod from gold thread, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. ³They hammered gold sheets thin and cut them into threads to be woven into the blue, purple, and scarlet yarn and the fine linen — the work of a skilled designer. ⁴They made shoulder pieces for the ephod, attached at its two upper corners so it could be joined together. ⁵The skillfully woven band of the ephod was of one piece with it, made the same way — from gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ⁶They prepared the onyx stones, mounted in gold filigree settings, engraved like a seal with the names of Israel's sons. ⁷They fastened the stones to the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ⁸They fashioned the breastpiece with skilled design, matching the workmanship of the ephod — from gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and finely twisted linen. ⁹The breastpiece was square when folded double — a span long and a span wide. ¹⁰They mounted four rows of gemstones on it. The first row contained a carnelian, a topaz, and an emerald. ¹¹The second row had a turquoise, a sapphire, and a diamond. ¹²The third row held a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst. ¹³The fourth row contained a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper — each set in a gold filigree mounting. ¹⁴The stones corresponded to the names of Israel's sons — twelve in all, one for each tribe, each engraved like a seal with the name of one tribe. ¹⁵For the breastpiece they crafted braided chains of pure gold, twisted like cords. ¹⁶They made two gold filigree settings and two gold rings, attaching the rings to the two upper corners of the breastpiece. ¹⁷They attached the two gold braided chains to the two rings at the corners of the breastpiece. ¹⁸The other two ends of the braided chains they fastened to the two filigree settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. ¹⁹They made two more gold rings and attached them to the two lower corners of the breastpiece, on its inner edge next to the ephod. ²⁰They made two additional gold rings and fastened them to the lower part of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front near its seam, just above the woven band. ²¹They tied the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it rested on the woven band and would not come loose from the ephod — just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²²They wove the robe of the ephod entirely from blue yarn. ²³It had an opening at the center, like the collar of a coat of armor, with a reinforced band

around the opening so it would not tear. ²⁴On the lower hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and scarlet yarn, and twisted linen. ²⁵They also made bells of pure gold and placed them between the pomegranates around the lower hem of the robe — ²⁶alternating a bell and a pomegranate all around the hem of the robe worn for ministry, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁷They wove tunics of fine linen for Aaron and his sons, ²⁸along with a turban of fine linen, decorative headbands of fine linen, and undergarments of finely twisted linen, ²⁹and a sash of finely twisted linen with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn — embroidered work — just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³⁰They made the medallion — the sacred diadem — from pure gold, and inscribed on it like a seal engraving: HOLY TO THE LORD. ³¹They attached a blue cord to fasten it to the top of the turban, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³²So all the work on the tabernacle — the tent of meeting — was completed. The Israelites had done everything precisely as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³³They presented the tabernacle to Moses: the tent with all its furnishings — its clasps, frames, crossbars, posts, and bases; ³⁴the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of fine leather, and the screening curtain; ³⁵the ark of the testimony with its poles and the mercy seat; ³⁶the table with all its utensils and the bread of the Presence; ³⁷the pure gold lampstand with its row of lamps and all its accessories, together with the oil for illumination; ³⁸the gold altar, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the screen for the tent entrance; ³⁹the bronze altar with its bronze grating, its poles, and all its equipment; the basin with its stand; ⁴⁰the curtains of the courtyard with their posts and bases, the screen for the courtyard entrance, its ropes and tent pegs, and all the equipment for the service of the tabernacle — the tent of meeting; ⁴¹the woven garments for service in the sanctuary, the sacred garments for Aaron the priest, and his sons' garments for priestly service. ⁴²The Israelites carried out all the work exactly as the LORD had commanded Moses. ⁴³Moses inspected all the work, and indeed they had accomplished it just as the LORD had commanded. So Moses blessed them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The priestly garment section begins. 'As the LORD commanded Moses' appears as a refrain throughout chapter 39, echoing the creation account's 'and God said.'
2. The ephod — the high priest's outer vestment — is the most complex garment, incorporating gold thread woven directly into the colored yarns and linen.
3. Hammering gold into thin sheets, then cutting into threads for weaving — a technically demanding process that integrates gold directly into fabric.
4. Shoulder pieces join the front and back panels of the ephod, creating the structural support for the entire garment and the breastpiece attached to it.
5. The woven band (cheshev) is integral to the ephod, not a separate belt. Its unified construction mirrors the tabernacle's one-piece design philosophy.
6. Onyx stones engraved with Israel's tribal names function like a signet seal — each tribe's identity is permanently inscribed and carried by the high priest.
7. The shoulder stones are 'memorial stones' (avnei zikkaron) — the high priest physically carries Israel's names before God whenever he enters the sanctuary.
8. The breastpiece (choshen) matches the ephod in materials and workmanship. It lies over the heart, while the shoulder stones rest on the shoulders — Israel is borne on heart and shoulders.
9. The doubled square (a span = about 9 inches) creates a pocket or pouch, traditionally understood as housing the Urim and Thummim for divine inquiry.
10. The four rows of three stones = twelve stones for twelve tribes. Stone identification varies among ancient sources, reflecting uncertainty about exact minerals.
11. The second row of precious stones continues the tribal representation. Each stone is unique, reflecting the distinct identity of each Israelite tribe.
12. The third row of gemstones. The order likely corresponds to the birth order or camp arrangement of Israel's twelve tribes.
13. The fourth row completes the twelve stones. Gold filigree settings secure each stone — precious material holding precious material, all bearing tribal names.
14. Each stone is individually engraved like a seal — permanent, authoritative, personal. The high priest wears Israel's identity into God's presence.
15. Braided gold chains connect the breastpiece to the ephod. The 'twisted cord' (avot) design provides both beauty and structural strength.
16. Filigree gold settings and rings create the upper attachment system. The engineering ensures the breastpiece hangs securely from the shoulders.

17. Gold chains thread through the upper corner rings, creating the primary suspension for the breastpiece from the shoulder pieces above.
18. The chains fasten to filigree settings on the shoulder pieces, distributing the breastpiece's weight evenly across both shoulders.
19. Additional lower rings on the breastpiece's inner edge prevent it from swinging outward during the priest's movements.
20. Matching rings on the lower ephod near the seam above the woven band complete the four-point attachment system securing the breastpiece.
21. A blue cord ties the lower rings together, ensuring the breastpiece stays flush against the ephod. The refrain 'as the LORD commanded Moses' validates the execution.
22. The robe (me'il) worn under the ephod is entirely blue (tekhelet) — the color associated with heaven and divine presence.
23. The reinforced collar opening prevents tearing — practical garment engineering for a robe that must endure regular priestly service without damage.
24. Pomegranates on the hem — symbols of fruitfulness and abundance. Their blue, purple, and scarlet colors match the tabernacle's decorative palette.
25. Pure gold bells between the pomegranates produce sound as the priest moves, announcing his presence in the sanctuary before God.
26. Alternating bells and pomegranates create a rhythmic pattern of sound and symbol. The robe is 'for ministry' — designed for its sacred function.
27. Fine linen tunics (kuttonet) for Aaron and his sons are the innermost garments — simple white linen worn next to the body beneath the other vestments.
28. The turban (mitznefet) for Aaron, headbands (migba'ot) for his sons, and linen undergarments complete the basic priestly wardrobe of purity and modesty.
29. The sash (avnet) of embroidered linen with colored yarn wraps the waist, securing the tunic. Even this accessory follows God's exact specifications.
30. The gold medallion (tzitz) inscribed HOLY TO THE LORD is the crown of the priestly wardrobe — it rests on the turban at the forehead, Israel's holiness made visible.
31. A blue cord secures the medallion to the turban. Blue (tekhelet) connects the priestly crown to the heavenly realm the priest mediates between.
32. The summary formula echoes Genesis 2:1-2 — 'all the work was completed.' The tabernacle construction parallels the creation narrative in structure and language.
33. The completed tabernacle and all its components are presented to Moses for inspection — structural elements first: clasps, frames, crossbars, posts, bases.
34. The protective coverings and the inner curtain are presented — the layers that shield and separate within the sacred structure.
35. The ark of the testimony and the mercy seat — the most sacred objects — are listed among the items brought for Moses's inspection.
36. The table and bread of the Presence — the furnishing of the Holy Place that represents God's sustaining provision for His covenant people.
37. The pure gold lampstand with all its accessories and oil — ready for the perpetual light that will illuminate the Holy Place.
38. The gold incense altar, anointing oil, and incense — the worship implements, along with the entrance screen — are presented.
39. The bronze altar and basin — the courtyard furniture for sacrifice and cleansing — complete the major furnishing inventory.
40. Courtyard infrastructure — curtains, posts, bases, gate screen, ropes, and pegs — all the elements that define the sacred perimeter.
41. The priestly garments close the inventory. Both service garments (bigdei serad) and sacred garments (bigdei ha-qodesh) are presented for approval.
42. The comprehensive compliance statement: Israel did everything exactly as commanded. Obedience in construction mirrors the obedience demanded in worship.
43. Moses's inspection and blessing parallel God's review of creation (Gen 1:31). 'He saw... they had done it... and he blessed them' echoes 'God saw that it was good.'

40

Summary: *On the first day of the first month — exactly one year after the exodus — Moses erects the tabernacle, places the ark, sets up the furnishings, anoints everything, and consecrates Aaron and his sons. The cloud covers the tent and the glory of the LORD fills the tabernacle.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The tabernacle is erected on Israel's anniversary of liberation (v2, cf. 12:2) — the exodus began with departure from Egypt and culminates with God taking up residence among His people. The final verses (vv34-38) describe the cloud of the LORD covering the tent and His kavod ('glory') filling the mishkan so powerfully that even Moses 'was not able to enter.' The God who descended on Sinai in cloud and fire now descends into the structure Israel built for Him. The book that began with Israel enslaved ends with God dwelling among them, leading them by cloud and fire.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase velo-yakhol Mosheh lavo el-ohel mo'ed ('Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting,' v35) creates a striking tension — the man who spoke with God face to face (33:11) cannot enter the space filled with God's glory. We rendered this literally without resolving the tension, as the Hebrew holds both realities together. The cloud-and-fire guidance system (vv36-38) we rendered straightforwardly, noting that it echoes the pillar of cloud and fire from 13:21-22, now permanently attached to the tabernacle rather than leading from a distance.*

Connections: *The glory filling the tabernacle parallels the glory filling Solomon's temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) and Ezekiel's visionary temple (Ezekiel 43:1-5). The cloud-and-fire guidance continues through Numbers and Deuteronomy. The incarnation ('the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,' John 1:14) is the ultimate fulfillment of God dwelling with His people. Revelation 21:3 ('the dwelling place of God is with man') completes the trajectory that begins here.*

¹The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²"On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. ³You shall place the ark of the Testimony in it and screen the ark with the veil. ⁴You shall bring in the table and arrange what belongs on it. You shall bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. ⁵You shall place the golden altar for incense before the ark of the Testimony and set up the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. ⁶You shall place the altar of burnt offering before the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. ⁷You shall place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it. ⁸You shall set up the courtyard all around and hang the screen for the gate of the courtyard. ⁹"Then you shall take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it shall become holy. ¹⁰You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, and the altar shall become most holy. ¹¹You shall also anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate it. ¹²"Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting and wash them with water. ¹³You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve Me as priest. ¹⁴You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them. ¹⁵You shall anoint them as you anointed their father, so that they may serve Me as priests. Their anointing shall be for them an eternal priesthood throughout their generations." ¹⁶Moses did everything; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did. ¹⁷In the first month of the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up. ¹⁸Moses set up the tabernacle. He laid its bases, set up its frames, put in its bars, and erected its pillars. ¹⁹He spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering of the tent over it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁰He took the Testimony and put it into the ark, and he set the poles on the ark and placed the atonement cover on top of the ark. ²¹He brought the ark into the tabernacle and set up the veil of the screen and screened off the ark of the Testimony, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²²He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the veil. ²³He arranged the bread on it before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁴He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle. ²⁵He set up the lamps before the LORD, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁶He placed the golden altar in the tent of meeting, before the veil, ²⁷and burned fragrant incense on it, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ²⁸He set up the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. ²⁹He placed the altar of

burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³⁰He placed the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. ³¹Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet from it. ³²Whenever they entered the tent of meeting or approached the altar, they washed, as the LORD had commanded Moses. ³³He set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and the altar and hung the screen of the gate of the courtyard. So Moses finished the work. ³⁴Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶Whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out on each stage of their journey. ³⁷But if the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out until the day it was taken up. ³⁸The cloud of the LORD rested on the tabernacle during the day, and fire glowed within it at night, visible to the entire house of Israel at every stage of their travels.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The final chapter of Exodus begins where the book's central concern has always been heading: the assembly of God's dwelling place among His people.
2. 'The first day of the first month' — exactly one year after the exodus (cf. 12:2, where this month was declared 'the beginning of months'). The tabernacle is erected on Israel's anniversary of liberation. The exodus began with departure from Egypt; it culminates with God taking up residence among His people.
3. The ark of the Testimony goes in first — the most sacred object enters the most sacred space. The veil screens it from the rest of the sanctuary.
4. The table and lampstand are positioned in the Holy Place — provision (bread) and illumination (light) in the space where priests serve daily.
5. The incense altar before the ark — fragrant smoke at the threshold of the Most Holy Place. The golden altar's position marks the boundary between the accessible and the veiled.
6. The bronze altar at the entrance — sacrifice is the first encounter upon entering sacred space. Everything else is beyond the altar.
7. The basin between altar and tent — purification mediates between sacrifice and service. The priest washes after handling blood and before entering God's presence.
8. The courtyard enclosure completes the physical structure. From this point, the tabernacle is a bounded, ordered, layered space: courtyard Holy Place Most Holy Place.
9. Anointing oil consecrates everything it touches — the tabernacle and all its contents become holy through the same oil. The verb *qiddesh* ('consecrate, make holy') transforms ordinary materials into sacred objects.
10. The bronze altar becomes 'most holy' (*qodesh qodashim*) — the same designation as the inner sanctum. The altar where blood is shed has the same holiness status as the space where God dwells. Sacrifice and presence share a holiness category.
11. The basin and stand — even the washing equipment is consecrated. Nothing in the tabernacle complex is merely utilitarian; everything participates in holiness.
12. Aaron and his sons are washed at the entrance — the same sequence as the consecration ceremony (29:4). The human priests are prepared last, after the physical space is complete.
13. Aaron is dressed and anointed — the *mashach* verb that makes him *mashiach*, the anointed one. The garments 'for glory and for beauty' (28:2) are put on.
14. The sons receive their tunics — the simpler priestly garments.
15. 'Their anointing shall be for them an eternal priesthood' (*vehayetah lahem mishchat olam lekhunnat olam*) — the Aaronic priesthood is established permanently. The anointing of this generation extends across all future generations.
16. 'Moses did everything; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did' (*vayyya'as Mosheh kekhol asher tsivvah YHWH oto ken asah*) — the obedience formula that defined Noah (Genesis 6:22) and governed the tabernacle's construction (39:32, 42-43) now covers the assembly. Moses's compliance is exact and total.
17. The date is precise: first month, first day, second year. The tabernacle stands exactly one year after the exodus. Israel's first anniversary is celebrated not with a parade but with the completion of God's house.
18. Moses himself assembles the tabernacle — the prophet becomes the builder. Each verb is specific: laid (bases), set up (frames), put in (bars), erected (pillars). The leader does the manual work.
19. The tent covering goes over the frame, then the outer covering over the tent — layers of protection from inside out, as specified in ch26.

20. 'He took the Testimony and put it into the ark' — the stone tablets enter the chest built to hold them. God's words, written by God's finger, are placed inside gold-covered acacia wood, under the kapporet. The most sacred text enters the most sacred container.
21. The ark enters the Most Holy Place and the veil is hung — the innermost zone is now sealed. 'As the LORD had commanded Moses' — the phrase occurs seven times in vv19-32 (seven = completeness), confirming that every step follows the divine blueprint.
22. The table on the north side — positioned as specified in 26:35. Each piece of furniture goes exactly where God said it should.
23. 'He arranged the bread before the LORD' — the twelve loaves of the Presence are set out for the first time. Israel is perpetually before God in the form of bread.
24. The lampstand on the south side, facing the table — light falls on the bread of the Presence. The arrangement is not random but liturgically purposeful.
25. The lamps are lit — the tabernacle interior is illuminated for the first time. God's dwelling has light.
26. The golden incense altar before the veil — the last piece of interior furniture. When incense burns, its smoke drifts through the veil into the Most Holy Place.
27. 'Burned fragrant incense' — the first incense offering in the tabernacle. Fragrance fills the space where God will dwell.
28. The entrance screen completes the tabernacle structure — the boundary between the courtyard and the sanctuary interior.
29. The first burnt offering and grain offering are placed on the bronze altar — the sacrificial system is inaugurated. Fire and blood begin their work.
30. Water in the basin — the purification system is active.
31. Moses, Aaron, and his sons wash — the priestly team is purified and ready for service.
32. The washing becomes the established practice: entering the tent or approaching the altar requires purification. The system is operational.
33. 'So Moses finished the work' (vayekhal Mosheh et-hammelakhah) — the verb kalah ('finished, completed') echoes Genesis 2:1-2: 'God finished... the work He had been doing.' Moses's completion of the tabernacle parallels God's completion of creation. The tabernacle is a new creation — an ordered, sacred space where heaven and earth intersect.
34. 'The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle' (vaykhas he'anan et-ohel mo'ed ukhvod YHWH male et-hammishkan) — the climax of the entire book of Exodus. Everything — the plagues, the Passover, the sea crossing, the manna, the Sinai theophany, the golden calf, the intercession, the renewal, the construction — has led to this single moment: God moves in. The cloud (anan) that guided Israel through the wilderness (13:21) now settles on the tabernacle. The kavod that appeared at Sinai (24:16-17) now fills the interior. The Shekhinah — God's dwelling presence — has arrived.
35. 'Moses was not able to enter' (velo-yakhol Mosheh lavo el-ohel mo'ed) — the man who spoke with God face to face (33:11), who entered the thick darkness on Sinai (20:21), who saw God's back (33:23), cannot enter the tabernacle because the kavod is too dense, too heavy, too present. The glory that settled on Sinai has intensified in the enclosed space. The tabernacle is so full of God that there is no room for Moses. Solomon will experience the same phenomenon at the temple dedication (1 Kings 8:10-11).
36. The cloud governs Israel's movement: when it lifts, they travel; when it stays, they stay. The Shekhinah is not merely a resident but a guide. God's presence is both location (where He dwells) and direction (where He leads).
37. 'If the cloud was not taken up, they did not set out' — Israel waits for God's movement before moving themselves. Divine presence determines the pace. The people do not set their own schedule; they follow the cloud.
38. 'The cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys' — the final verse of Exodus closes with the dual manifestation: cloud by day, fire by night. The same theophany elements from the exodus march (13:21-22) now rest permanently on the tabernacle. God's presence is visible to all Israel — not hidden, not intermittent, but constant, public, and undeniable. The book that began with Israel enslaved in Egypt ends with Israel guided by God's glory through the wilderness. The exodus is complete not when Israel leaves Egypt but when God takes up residence among them.