

2. The Narrative Progression of Exodus 3-6

The narrative progression of Ex 3-6, a series of problems answered by promises/solutions, serve to foreshadow the Exodus from Egypt in the following chapters and to communicate its broader significance for the relationship between God and Israel and for understanding the nature of God and His power.

Problem	Solution/Promised Solution
Oppression and enslavement of Israelites in Egypt	In theophany to Moses on Mt. Sinai/Horev, God, honoring his covenant with and promises to Abraham, promises to deliver his people through Moses and bring them into the Promised Land: " <u>I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...</u> I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and <u>I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey,</u> to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." (3:6-10)
Moses' reluctance: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (3:11)	Divine assurance, plus foreshadowing of theophany to entire people on Mt. Sinai/Horev: "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: <u>when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.</u> " (3:12)
Moses' reluctance, fearing that the people will not listen to him, due to uncertainty about identity of the One who speaks to him (3:13)	Revelation of divine Name (YHWH; 3:14-15) and repetition of promise of deliverance and instructions to convene Israelites to tell them about it (3:16-17), followed by assurance that Moses will be heard, plus foreshadowing of the plagues and exodus: "They 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; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.' <u>I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So 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.</u> I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians." (3:18-22)
Moses' reluctance, due to fears that Israelites won't believe that YHWH appeared to him (4:1)	God empowers Moses to work miracles "so that they may believe that YHWH, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has appeared to you": to turn a staff into a snake (4:2-5); to make his hand leprous and then unwithered (4:6-7); to take water from the Nile and have it turn into blood when poured on dry ground (4:9)
Moses' reluctance, ostensibly due to his lack of eloquence (4:10) but actually because he wishes that God would send someone else (4:13)	God's assertion that He is the One who gave speech to mortals, etc., fails to convince Moses, so after growing angry, he decides that Aaron, his brother, can serve as the mouthpiece, with Moses telling him what to say (4:11, 14-17).
As Moses heads back to Egypt, the Lord meets Moses and tries to kill him (4:24)	Moses' wife Zipporah figures out the reason: their son is not circumcised (i.e., their family hasn't held by the human side of the Abrahamic covenant, even as God is clearly holding up His end). She cuts off his foreskin and touches Moses' feet with it (4:25-26). All then goes as planned: Aaron joins Moses and learns the news; they assemble the elders among the Israelites and Aaron reports and performs the miracles (4:27-30); and, most importantly, "The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped" (4:31)

Problem	Solution
<p>Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh, as planned, and report that “Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: ‘Let my people go so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness” (5:1). Although they pretend that the Israelites will only be gone for a little while, Pharaoh still refuses because he has no idea who YHWH is (“Who is YHWH, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know YHWH, and I will not let Israel go”; 5:2):</p>	<p>Moses and Aaron try to convince Pharaoh by stressing that the Israelites won’t be going that far (i.e., only 3-days journey) and by claiming that YHWH will kill them if they don’t go: “He will fall upon us with pestilence or sword” (5:3)</p>
<p>Pharaoh is not convinced; he thinks that the request is due to the Israelites’ laziness—they want to go off to festival because they don’t want to work! Not only does he not let them go, but he makes the Israelites’ job more difficult by not providing them the straw needed to make bricks (5:5-11); this makes the people upset; they blame Moses and Aaron, and Moses complains to God, feeling confirmed in his initial reluctance: “O YHWH, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me? Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people” (5:22-23)</p>	<p>God reassures Moses with more promises: "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land" (6:1). He reiterates the continuance of His covenant with Abraham but also notes the expansion and evolution: "I am YHWH. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name YHWH I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan... I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant... I am YHWH, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment" (6:2-6). The promise culminates with the assertion that Israel will be YHWH’s chosen people: <u>“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am YHWH your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.”</u> (6:7).</p>
<p>Moses tells the people, but they don’t believe him because of their “broken spirit and cruel slavery” (6:9).</p>	<p>God tells Moses to go back and talk to Pharaoh, then gives Moses and Aaron further instructions, to which the reader of Exodus isn’t privy (6:13). This is followed by a genealogy, which outlines the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelites as they correlated to the sons of Jacob and as they will be brought out from Egypt (6:14-27).</p>

