

Amenhotep II

I am Amenhotep II, son of Thutmose III. When I was a student in the royal school, founded by my step-grandmother, Hatshepsut, I learned about previous Pharaohs and their accomplishments. I also discovered that my family was cursed by the failure of the number one wife of the reigning Pharaoh to consistently produce a male heir. Amenhotep I, my great-great grandfather, had no eligible sons. He married his daughter to Thutmose I, a prominent general and they likewise did not produce a male heir, but they did have a daughter, my step-grandmother, Hatshepsut, who was married to her half-brother Thutmose II, my grandfather, who was the son of a lesser wife of Thutmose I while they were both very young. By this marriage, my step-grandmother passed on to her husband (my grandfather) Thutmose II, the right to the throne. That marriage produced only a daughter whom they married very young to my father Thutmose III, who was the son of a lesser wife of Thutmose II. When my grandfather Thutmose II died young, my step-grandmother Hatshepsut ruled Egypt as Pharaoh. Thutmose III, had no children from Hatshepsut's daughter, who also died young. I was born of a lesser wife of my father Thutmose III. However, I was not the oldest son but my older brother, who was named Amenemhat, died before our father and thus I became the heir to the throne.

It was enough to make me dizzy! In comparison, math was easy!

When I was very young, I remember seeing a strange man who often came and greeted my grandmother as if he were family. He was dressed Egyptian but looked a lot like our slaves! I asked Grandmother who he was and she told me that she had adopted him when he was an infant. He had been placed in a basket in the Nile during the reign of her grandfather. Yes, she told me, he was an Israelite and they had not always been slaves. Long ago, in the time of Pharaoh Sesostri, an ancestor of that people had saved the nation from starvation, by sorcery and wisdom. Because of that, the whole family had been rewarded with the best land for grazing sheep.

Many generations later, the astrologers noted an auspicious sign in the stars, pointing to the birth of a great leader, possibly a Hebrew, and the order had been given to kill all baby boys. My great grandmother as a young woman had felt sympathy for the infant, but also reasoned that perhaps the Nile god had given us a male child that we could not seem to produce on our own. The child was named Moses – drawn out of water – and was schooled like all the rest of us in the royal family. He had grown up by the time I saw him. When I asked about him again later, after he had not appeared for a while, I was told that he had left the country, but no one would tell me why.

I had forgotten all this after I ascended to the throne of Egypt. One day, two old men, each carrying a stick, were ushered into my throne room. One was dressed like a Midianite, the other like an Israelite. That Israelite addressed me with the most remarkable audacity, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people

go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.” Shocked by the lack of protocol or respect, I replied, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."

Was there something familiar about these men? Of course, all Israelites look the same, but something struck me as strange, beyond the unbelievable demand – not even a humble request! They responded with, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." I interpreted it as an attempt to decrease their work-load and ordered the supervisors to keep the quota of bricks the same but stop providing them with the necessary straw. This succeeded in turning the people against their negotiators and I expected it to end with that.

But they returned and this time added a demonstration of their sorcery. The spokesman threw down his stick and it turned into a snake. I had seen this and asked my magicians to answer it. They threw down their sticks which also became snakes. The only problem is that the Israelite's snake swallowed my magicians' snakes. That was disturbing, but the encounter ended.

I next met them as I walked down to the Nile in the morning. They told me, "This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD: with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood." They did it and the water turned to blood and the fish began turning belly up, dead! The magicians responded by finding clean water and doing the same thing. That was impressive but not at all helpful.

Over a week, all the people of Egypt were reduced to digging wells near the river for drinking water. Of course, I called my advisors as well as magicians. I was beginning to get a bad feeling about this and thought about how the histories would record my reign. Then my double nemesis reappeared and stated, "This is what the LORD says: 'Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs.'" Of course, I refused and the frogs came. All my magicians could do was duplicate the sorcery, not counteract it. It was obvious that the god of the Israelites was stronger than our gods. I asked them, "Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD."

By now I had heard that one of these men was called Moses and the other, his brother, Aaron. They prayed and the frogs died but did not disappear. They had to be piled in stinking heaps. But the crisis was over and I reconsidered my promise. We were talking about the disposition of perhaps a million slaves. I told them the deal was off. This was followed by a succession of plagues from gnats to flies to death of animals, to boils on men and beasts. By now my magicians could not even duplicate, much less counteract these disasters. There was hail, locusts and darkness. I would not relent

and told the tormentors of Egypt that I would not see them again and I finally said, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die." He responded, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well.'"

My advisors told me that my people were terrified and were handing their jewelry over to the slaves. They also said that the Israelites were doing something with sheep, preparing them for sacrifice and removing their skin. Although sheep are considered unclean by us, they had some sort of symbolic significance to them. As a precaution, I prepared a sheepskin for my first-born son, Webensenu, in case that provided protection. I hoped it was all a bluff, but every other prediction had come true. Why had I not relented and let them go? Was it not wanting to be remembered as the Pharaoh who lost the slaves? Was it overestimation of my power as king?

In the middle of the night I heard cries coming from all directions and I ran to the bed of my son. He was not only dead but appeared to have died in agony! I called Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me." I realized that we had been beaten. I started preparation of my son's body. At least he should have an afterlife.

But now since it was clear that the Israelites were gone, my advisors had a proposal: go after the escaped slaves! it seems that the Israelites were wandering aimlessly and headed for a branch of the Red Sea where they could be trapped. Their value as slaves was immense and the humiliation of allowing them to go was damaging to the future of the whole nation. So I left Webensenu's body and mobilized the army, with foot soldiers, cavalry, chariots and drivers.

As we overtook them, an unruly crowd of men, women, children and animals, they were facing the sea and the people were murmuring against their leaders. With proper handling, they could be induced to rebel against Moses and Aaron and be willingly welcomed back. We were hindered by the cloud that accompanied them as it moved between us and them. But when the cloud lifted, we saw Moses raise his stick towards the sea. Incredibly, we saw the waters part and pile up on either side. The Israelites were ordered to march in and despite their grumbling, they did. As the crowd flowed over the beach, down to a surprisingly solid footing, I gave the order to pursue them.

They moved faster than seemed physically possible, and when my army was completely within what was formerly the sea and the slaves were all on the other shore, Moses lifted his stick again. My army stopped moving, as if they were stuck. I shouted to retreat but they struggled and could not move. Then the waters returned with a roar to their former place. I watched in horror and wonder. My legacy was

written and I could only hope for vindication in the future. I must organize recovery, deal with the dead, rebuild the army, replace the slaves and find a way to record these events as favorably to Egypt as possible. Moses is gone. I wonder if he prayed for me?

Exodus chapter 2, chapters 5 -14, Private Communication with Dr. Clyde Billington