

REFLECTIONS OF READERS

The festival of Passover perennially raises the question of which pharaoh reigned at the time of the Exodus. The usual favored candidate is Ramses II, one of Egypt's greatest pharaohs. He had a remarkably long reign, fought many battles, and was a prodigious builder. In Moses' encounters with Pharaoh, the former exhibits surprising impertinence. Would a ruler like Ramses II have tolerated such disrespect, or would he have ordered the immediate execution of the obnoxious upstart?

We are told that the Hebrews left Egypt *khamushim* [armed with weapons]. Whence did they obtain their weapons? Where and how did they get the training which would enable them to ward off the attacks of the Amalekites?

Is it possible that the Israelites were more formidable than has been supposed? If so, that might not have daunted Ramses II, but a lesser pharaoh might well have thought twice about disposing of Moses. However, once the Israelites were on the move and leaving Egypt, he might have taken the opportunity to pursue and eliminate them.

The destruction of the Egyptian forces at the Sea of Reeds should have caused a vast upheaval in Egypt. Apparently it did not. The dynasty of Ramses II continued. The pharaoh of the Exodus may have been of great importance to the Israelites, but not to the Egyptians. He can hardly have been Ramses II.

Oscar Davies
Jerusalem