

October 8, 2017 - Ex. 1:1-2:25 - Moses' birth and early life
Torah Reading: Exodus 1:1-2:25 - Moses' birth and early life
Psalm 42
Haftarah: Isaiah 27:6-13 + 28:1,5
Isaiah 62:2-9 + 63:7-9

Beginning to study the Book of Exodus

Exodus is a sweeping saga of redemption.

In the first chapter, the people of Israel, demoted from their respected status and made slaves by a Pharaoh who "knew not Joseph," have now multiplied, and are seen as a threat by the Egyptians.

The story of Moses, from a baby in the bulrushes, to royal prince, to fearless opponent of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, forms the backbone of a narrative filled with miraculous plagues and wonders.

We repeat a portion of the familiar tale every year at Passover.

But there are many ways of receiving its lessons. Like at Passover, we celebrate it either with sandals on and loins girded or reclining in the Promised Land. Like a version of "Groundhog's Day" we repeat the Exodus and re-interpret redemption with each generation, and even as we daily confront enslavement and God's release in our own confrontations with idolatry, injustice and sin - each time seeing a little more clearly.

Israel had to replay their exodus in a different way in their return from exile after captivity in Babylon. Jesus fulfilled the story in his own flight to Egypt and return, and ultimately at his crucifixion and resurrection, where redemption was assured once and for all time.

From Adam and Eve, to the call of Abraham, to Joseph and the 12 sons of Israel and now to a new nation formed from 12 tribes through this Exodus, God's purpose of redemption was being carried out - a purpose that would culminate in the Messiah.

One Midrash on the unleavened bread eaten at Passover relates to our response to the story of Exodus. The Rabbis say that reference to the "bread of affliction" (oni in Hebrew) should instead be vocalized as "onin" - bread of response, or "bread to which one responds with many words," an allusion to the Passover Seder "at which one recites the Haggadah and eats matza." (Pesachim 36a)

So eating the matza - at Passover or in our weekly afikomen ceremony of the Lord's Supper - invites a response, a speaking, an expansion on the tale, a retelling of the story of redemption, and how we each are involved in it now.

Recall these two prophecies from Genesis before beginning Exodus:

Genesis 15:13 - “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”

And

Genesis 46:2-4 - “And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”

Exodus 1:1 - “Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob.”

A list of the sons of Israel follows

Exodus 1:7 - “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly (vayishretzu), and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”

“vayishretzu” - to multiply abundantly, teem, swarm - used of God’s command to Noah to repeople the earth. Rashi - They bore six children at each birth.

This is fulfillment of the promise of the prophecies in Genesis, and also the reason for Pharaoh’s crackdown.

But the Israelites are nameless and anonymous, perhaps reflecting the loss of selfhood caused by slavery. At this stage of the story, only Pharaoh speaks. There is not even strength for a cry for help among the Israelites.

Exodus 1:8-10 - “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land.”

Rashi - Pharaoh “acted as if” he did not know about Joseph.

Rashi - Let us deal shrewdly with the Savior of Israel [thus interpreting וַיִּשְׂרֹטוּ as to him] by afflicting them [to die] with water, for He has already sworn that He would not bring a flood to the world. (But they [the Egyptians] did not understand that upon the whole world He would not bring [a flood] but He would bring it upon one nation [Egypt].

“Although God had sworn never to bring another flood upon men, there was nothing in the way of bringing men into a flood” (i.e. the parting of the Red Sea that destroyed Pharaoh’s army). - Legends of the Jews

Exodus 1:11-12 - “Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.”

Raameses - It’s name in later times, also used interchangeably with Goshen:

See **Genesis 47:11** - “And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.”

Rashi - The Holy Spirit says this: You [Pharaoh] say, Lest they multiply, but I say, So will they multiply. [From Sotah 11a]

“Unto their father Abraham I gave the promise that I would make his children be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, and you contrive plans to prevent hem from multiplying. We shall see whose word will stand, Mine or yours.” - Legends of the Jews

“grieved” is “quwts” - “a feeling of loathing, of vomiting, combined with fear and disgust.”

Rashi - Our Rabbis... interpreted it to mean that they [the Israelites] were like thorns (כקוצים) in their eyes -[from Sotah 11a].

Very much like anti-Semitism throughout history, or feelings of racial bigotry today.

Pharaoh’s Dream

“In the one hundred and thirtieth year after Israel's going down to Egypt Pharaoh dreamed that he was sitting upon his throne, and he lifted up his eyes, and he beheld an old man before him with a balance in his hand, and he saw him taking all the elders, nobles, and great men of Egypt, tying them together, and laying them in one scale of the balance, while he put a tender kid into the other. The kid bore down the pan in which it lay until it hung lower than the other with the bound Egyptians.

“Pharaoh arose early in the morning, and called together all his servants and his wise men to interpret his dream, and the men were greatly afraid on account of his vision. Balaam the son of Beor then spake, and said: ‘This means nothing but that a great evil will spring up against Egypt, for a son will be born unto Israel, who will destroy the whole of our land and all its inhabitants, and he will bring forth the Israelites from Egypt with a mighty hand. Now, therefore, O king, take counsel as to this matter, that the hope of Israel be frustrated before this evil arise against Egypt.’” - Legends of the Jews

Balaam continued:

"From all that the king may devise against the Hebrews, they will be delivered. If thou thinkest to diminish them by the flaming fire, thou wilt not prevail over them, for their God delivered Abraham their father from the furnace in which the Chaldeans cast him. Perhaps thou thinkest to destroy them with a sword, but their father Isaac was delivered from being slaughtered by the sword. And if thou thinkest to reduce them through hard and rigorous labor, thou wilt also not prevail, for their father Jacob served Laban in all manner of hard work, and yet he prospered. If it please the king, let him order all the male children that shall be born in Israel from this day forward to be thrown into the water. Thereby canst thou wipe out their name, for neither any of them nor any of their fathers was tried in this way." - Legends of the Jews

The end of the Egyptians was that they met their death in the billows of the Red Sea. "Measure for measure"--as they had drowned the male children of the Israelites, so they were drowned. - Legends of the Jews

The Rebellion of the Midwives

Exodus 1:15-17 - "And the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: And he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live. But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive."

Rashi - Pharaoh cared only about the males, because his astrologers told him that a son was destined to be born who would save them. [From Exod. Rabbah 1:18] See above

Exodus 1:18-19 - "And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said unto them, Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive? And the midwives said unto Pharaoh, Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them."

Rashi - Our Rabbis (Sotah 11b), however, interpreted it to mean that they [the Israelite women] are compared to beasts (חיות) of the field, which do not require midwives (referring to the blessings of Jacob and Moses on the tribes, which alluded to them as a cub, a lion, wolf, bull, gazelle etc.)

Exodus 1:21 - "And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses."

Rashi - The houses of the priesthood, the Levitic family, and the royal family, which are called houses, as it is written: And he built the house of the Lord and the house of the king, (I Kings 9:5), the priesthood and the Levitic family from Jochebed and the royal family from Miriam, as is stated in tractate Sotah (11b).

The Talmud insists that King David descended from Miriam through his mother's lineage.

The Talmud says (BT Sotah 11b) that because Miriam aided her mother Jochebed in saving the Jewish babies in Egypt, Miriam merited that King David's dynasty should descend from her.

The Talmud equates Miriam and her mother Jochebed with the two midwives Puah and Shiphrah mentioned in **Exodus 1:15-21**. 'Pu'ah' is Miriam; and why was her name called Puah? She used to cry out [po'ah] through the Holy Spirit and say: 'My mother will bear a son who will be the savior of Israel.'

Exodus 1:22 - "And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive."

Rashi - (Moses was saved from drowning in the Nile) however... [Moses] would ultimately suffer because of the water of Meribah (Num. 20:7-13) [i.e., that he would not be permitted to enter the Holy Land]. [From Sotah 12a, Exod. Rabbah 1:18, Sanh. 101b]

Birth of Moses

Strangely, his parents are not named at first. Moses first leaves his mother after three months. Then he is taken in to the palace by the princess. Later, now grown, he is "weaned" again from his sheltered life as an Egyptian prince through his compassion for his "brothers" the Hebrews.

Exodus 2:2 - "And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months."

Rashi - "saw that he was good": When he was born, the entire house was filled with light. [From Sotah 12a, Exod. Rabbah 1:20]

Exodus 2:3 - "And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime (clay) and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

The ark of Noah was pitched within and without with pitch. (Genesis 6:14)

Rashi - [Moses' ark of bulrushes had] pitch on the outside and clay on the inside so that the righteous person [Moses] should not smell the foul odor of pitch. [From Sotah 12a]

Moses as the savior of Israel and a type of Christ was placed within the clay of humanity, with its outward surface lined with pitch. The Hebrew word used for pitch in Genesis 6:14, Kopher (Strong's #3724), is from the root word used for "atonement" or

“covering. (Yom Kippur)” Exodus here uses a different word for the same substance.

Exodus 2:5 - “And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it.”

Rashi - [She stretched out her hand,] and her arm grew many cubits (אַמּוֹת) [so that she could reach the basket]. [From Sotah 12b, Exod. Rabbah 1:23]

Exodus 2:6 - “And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.”

Rashi - Whom did she see? The child. Its midrashic interpretation is that she saw the Shechinah with him. [From Sotah 12b, Exod. Rabbah 1:23]

Exodus 2:10 - “And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.”

Another Legend: Moses Takes Pharaoh's Crown

“Pharaoh was dining one day with the queen, his daughter and the infant Moses upon her lap. It happened that the infant took the crown from off the king's head, and placed it on his own. When the king and the princes saw this, they were terrified, and each one in turn expressed his astonishment. The king said unto the princes, "What speak you, and what say you, O ye princes, on this matter, and what is to be done to this Hebrew boy on account of this act?"

“They suggested that Pharaoh place an onyx stone before the child, and a coal of fire, and if he stretches out his hand and grasps the onyx stone, then shall we know that the child hath done with wisdom all that he hath done, and we will slay him. But if he stretches out his hand and grasps the coal of fire, then shall we know that it was not with consciousness that he did the thing, and he shall live.”

“When they did this, Moses stretched forth his hand toward the onyx stone and attempted to seize it, but the angel Gabriel guided his hand away from it and placed it upon the live coal, and the coal burnt the child's hand, and he lifted it up and touched it to his mouth, and burnt part of his lips and part of his tongue, and for all his life he became slow of speech and of a slow tongue.” - Legends of the Jews

Moses Kills an Egyptian

Exodus 2:11-12 - “And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.”

Rashi - and he saw that there was no man: [i.e., he saw that] there was no man destined to be descended from him [the Egyptian] who would become a proselyte [i.e., a convert]. [From Exod. Rabbah 1:29]

Exodus 2:15 - “Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well.”

Rashi - “and he sought to slay Moses”: He delivered him to the executioner to execute him, but the sword had no power over him. That is [the meaning of] what Moses said, “and He saved me from Pharaoh’s sword ” (Exod. 18:4). [From Mechilta, Yithro 1, Exod. Rabbah 1:321]

Rashi “he sat down by a well” - The Sages of the midrashim teach us that Moses sat there intentionally, for he expected to meet his mate, just as Jacob had met Rachel and Eliezer had met Rebecca when he sought a mate for Isaac.

Exodus 2:16 - “Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters: and they came and drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock.”

Rashi - Reuel/Jethro had abandoned idolatry, so they banned him from [living with] them. [From Exod. Rabbah 1:32, Tanchuma, Shemoth 11]

Exodus 2:20 - “And he said unto his daughters, And where is he? why is it that ye have left the man? call him, that he may eat bread.”

Rashi - “Why have you left the man”: He recognized him [Moses] as being of the seed of Jacob, for the water rose toward him. [From Exod. Rabbah 1:32, Tanchuma Shemoth 11]

Exodus 2:24 - “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.”

Rashi - God focused His attention [lit., He set His heart] upon them: and did not conceal His eyes from them.