

Story-retelling: The Exodus

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Source: The Minimalist Haggadah by Jon Kessler

Each new generation of Israelites, since the days of Joseph and his brothers, had multiplied greatly in the Narrow Places so that the land was filled with them.

A new Pharaoh came to power there. "Look," Pharaoh said to his courtiers, "there are too many Israelites among us. We must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies to fight against us." So Pharaoh put slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor.

Pharaoh said to two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what Pharaoh told them to do; they let the boys live. God was kind to the midwives and the Israelite people continued to become even more numerous.

A Levite woman, Jochebed, gave birth to a son. She hid him for three months until she could do so no longer. With her daughter Miriam's help, Jochebed placed the baby boy in a papyrus basket in the Nile River. When Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, she saw the basket among the reeds. She opened it, saw the baby was crying, and felt sorry for him. Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

After Moses grew up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew; seeing no one else around, he killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses. Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian for a long time.

During that long period, Pharaoh died but the slavery continued. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out to God. God heard their groaning and remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

One day, Moses was shepherding flocks in the wilderness near Mt Horeb, when an angel of God appeared in fiery flames within a bush. Moses saw the bush was on fire but that it did not burn up. God called to Moses from within the bush and said, "I have seen the misery of my people in the Narrow Places. I have come down to rescue them and to bring them up into a land flowing with milk and honey. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of there."

Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of the Narrow Places?"

And God said, "I will be with you."

Then Moses said to God, "So I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask, 'What's his name?' What shall I tell them?"

And God said, " *I am who I am*. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: *I am* has sent me to you."

Then Moses said to God, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me?"

And God said, "Throw your staff on the ground." It became a snake. God encouraged Moses to reach out and take hold of the snake's tail. It turned back into a staff in his hand.

And God said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it

out, the skin was leprous. Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out again, it was restored.

And God said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. And if they do not believe these two signs, pour some Nile river-water on the dry ground - it will become blood."

Then Moses said to God, "But I have never been eloquent - I am slow of speech and tongue."

And God said, "Who gave human beings their mouths? I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

Then Moses said, "Please send someone else."

And God said, "What about your brother, Aaron? I know he can speak well. You shall speak to him, he will speak to the people for you, and I will help you both speak."

Moses returned to the Narrow Places. He, his brother Aaron, and his sister Miriam brought together all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron told them everything God had said to Moses, performing the signs before the people. When the Israelites understood that God had seen and heard their misery, they bowed down and worshiped God.

Moses and Aaron went to the new Pharaoh and said, "The God of Israel says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'" Pharaoh replied, "Who is this God that I should obey and let Israel go? I don't know him and I won't let them go. It seems these people are lazy, so I will no longer have the slave masters supply them straw for bricks." The Israelites, in turn, found fault in Moses and Aaron for this extra burden.

Then Moses said to God, "Why have you brought more trouble on this people? Is this why you sent me? You have not rescued your people at all."

And God said, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: because of my mighty hand, he will let them go and he will even drive them out of the country."

Moses and Aaron returned to Pharaoh as God advised. Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and his courtiers. The staff became a snake. Unimpressed, Pharaoh's court magicians threw down their staffs which also became snakes. Aaron's snake ate their snakes, but Pharaoh was not moved to let the Israelites go.

And God said to Moses, "Go down with Aaron to meet Pharaoh by the Nile tomorrow morning. Tell Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews has sent me to say to you: 'Let my people go so that they will worship me in the wilderness.' Then strike the waters of the Nile with the staff so that Pharaoh knows who God is. But Pharaoh's heart will be hardened, so I have a few other ideas in store for him. . . ."