

^{1,8}Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹"Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country." ¹¹So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹²But **the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread**; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

1. (v. 8) וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ—*A new king arose*. He was a monarch of a new dynasty with nationalistic policies, probably Rameses I. The king under whom Joseph had served belonged to the Asiatic dynasty of the Hyksos¹ (shepherds), whose reign over Egypt had begun several centuries earlier. **The Hyksos dynasty ruled until shortly after Joseph's death**. The first instance of virulent anti-Semitism in the history of the Jewish people begins with the words *a new king arose*. This phrase points to the fact that the source of this anti-Semitism was **the Egyptian leadership rather than the masses**. If the Egyptian people themselves had been hostile, it would have been unnecessary for Pharaoh to foment their hatred by making farfetched accusations (such as that the Jews would join with foreign enemies for a surprise attack).²
2. (v. 9) עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל—*The people, the Children of Israel*. Pharaoh was the first person to describe the Children of Israel as a people. Though they were still a minority in Egypt, their miraculous growth and solidarity posed a potential threat. It was this solidarity that made them a nation whereas **the Egyptians were split up into a large number of castes**.
 - a. The ancient Egyptian people were grouped in a hierarchical system with the Pharaoh at the top and farmers and slaves at the bottom. Egyptian social classes had some porous borders but **they were largely fixed and clearly delineated**, not unlike the medieval feu-

dal system. Clearly, the groups of people nearest the top of society were the richest and most powerful.³

King (Pharaoh), Vizier, Priests-Elite-Officials, Doctors-Engineers, Scribes-Merchants, Artists-Craftsmen, Workers-Soldiers-Farmers-Builders.

3. (v. 10) הָבָה נִתְחַכְמָהּ לוֹ—*Come, let us outsmart it*. Pharaoh and his advisers were against annihilating the Jews, because that would have been considered a barbarous act by the Egyptian people. In addition it would have been considered disloyal to the previous king who had welcomed the Jews into his land. Instead Pharaoh and his advisers proceeded in a very cautious way so that the Jews would not realize their real intentions. They first began by imposing upon the Jews special duties that were frequently performed by aliens (*IChron* 2:17). Next, they secretly ordered the midwives to kill all the newborn males, before the mothers had a chance to realize what was happening. Lastly, the Egyptians were ordered to drown all young Jewish males wherever they might be found. Once the Egyptians realized that the king had loosened all restrictions they broke into Jewish homes at night, kidnapped their newborn sons and immediately drowned them (Ramban).

Pharaoh had a council of three advisers composed of **Balaam, Job, and Jethro** (*Sotah* 11a). In response to the suggested decree to enslave the Jews, Job remained silent and was later punished for his silence by the ordeals he endured as recounted in the Book of Job. Jethro fled rather than acquiesce, and this earned him the merit of having his descendants sit in the Sanhedrin (*IChron* 2:55). As for Balaam, who had devised the diabolical scheme in the first place, he ultimately met his death at the hands of Phineas, the grand-nephew of Moses (*Num* 31:8).

Balaam ... was a mortal enemy of the Jews even before the birth of Moses. In the one hundred and thirtieth year after the arrival of Israel in Egypt, **Pharaoh had a disturbing dream in which he saw his kingdom's downfall brought about by a single lamb**. He called for Balaam and the two other members of the royal council to advise him. Balaam explained that the savior of the Jews would be born shortly and would one day destroy Egypt. When asked what steps could be taken to avoid this calamity, Balaam replied: "If you wish to destroy the Jewish people by fire you will not succeed because **their God rescued Abraham from the fiery furnace**. If you attempt to destroy them through slavery and hardship you will not succeed because Jacob was enslaved by Laban and grew prosperous from that servitude. You have but one last resort; to decree that the sons of the Jews be drowned. **Water is the only element of danger which their ancestors never confronted**."

1 Ancient Egypt's first "foreign" takeover may actually have been an inside job. About 3600 years ago, the pharaohs briefly lost control of northern Egypt to the Hyksos, rulers who looked and behaved like people **from an area stretching from present-day Syria in the north to Israel in the south**. The traditional explanation is that the Hyksos were an invading force. But a fresh analysis of skeletons from the ancient Hyksos capital suggests an alternative: The Hyksos were Egyptian-born members of an immigrant community that rose up and grabbed power.

2 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Shemos*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 5-15.

3 <https://www.historyonthenet.com/egyptian-social-classes>

Pharaoh accepted Balaam's suggestion, but Moses nevertheless survived, having been saved from drowning by Pharaoh's own daughter Bisyah, who adopted him and raised him in the royal palace. Once when Moses was three years old, he was seated next to Pharaoh in the lap of Princess Bisyah. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Moses took hold of the royal crown and put it on his own head. Shocked by such audacity, Pharaoh immediately summoned his counselors to advise him on the possible implications. Balaam reminded Pharaoh of the dream and his interpretation and urged Pharaoh to put Moses to death immediately. He explained that, as Moses was a child of the Hebrews, this incident portended that he would seize power.

Pharaoh rejected his counsel and, acting upon other advice, put Moses to a test. Two platters were placed before Moses, one containing burning coals and the other containing precious stones. Guided by the hands of an angel, the young lad reached for the coals and put them into his mouth, scorching his tongue and lips. **From that time onward he experienced difficulty in his speech.** Pharaoh and his dignitaries inferred from this foolish choice that the boy's seizure of the crown had no sinister implications, but was merely an act of childish playfulness (*Sefer HaYashar*⁴ [Book of the Upright One]).

a. John 1:29

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the **Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!**"

b. Genesis Rabbah 38:11⁵

(Terah) took (Abraham) and gave him over to Nimrod. (Nimrod) said to him: Let us worship the fire! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship water, which extinguishes fire! (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the water! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the clouds, which carry the water? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the cloud! (Abraham) said to him: If so,

Should we not then worship the wind, which scatters the clouds? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the wind! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the human, who withstands the wind? (Nimrod) said to him: You are merely piling words; we should bow to none other than the fire. **I shall therefore cast you in it, and let your God to whom you bow come and save you from it!**

At the core of this story stands what appears to be a *derasha* on the name of Abraham's city, Ur of the Chaldeans (אור כשדים), **which was creatively interpreted by some ancient exegetes to mean literally אור, fire or flames.** Thus, Gen. 15:7 was understood as saying, "I am the Lord who rescued you from the midst of the fire of the Chaldeans."

The nature of this fire was ... open to various interpretations, and some exegetes, doubtless inspired by the story of Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in Daniel (Dan 3:19-23), interpreted the phrase to mean that Abraham too was saved from a **fiery furnace** prepared by the Chaldeans to burn him.

In that story ... three young men—Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—are cast into a **fiery furnace** by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, because of their refusal to worship an idol, and are eventually saved by God.

c. Matthew 2:16-17

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and **he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under**, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

d. Exodus 4:10

¹⁰Moses said to the LORD, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. **I am slow of speech and tongue**" (lit., "**heavy** of speech and **heavy** of tongue am I").

e. Anti-Semitism is often based on a the perception that Jews have power and influence. Case in point: "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,"⁶ a forgery purporting to be the conspiratorial discussions of the Jewish elders plotting to take over the world. **It was—next to**

4 The Book of Jasher, which means the Book of the Upright or the Book of the Just Man, is a book mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, often interpreted as a lost non-canonical book. Numerous forgeries purporting to be rediscovered copies of this lost book have been written.

Joshua 10:13

¹³So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in **the Book of Jasher**. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day.

2Samuel 1:17-18

¹⁷David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, ¹⁸and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in **the Book of Jasher**) ...

5 <https://www.thetorah.com/article/why-the-midrash-has-abraham-thrown-into-nimrods-furnace>

6 *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a fabricated antisemitic text purporting to describe a Jewish plan for global domination. The hoax was plagiarized from several earlier sources. It was first published in Russia in 1903, translated into multiple languages, and disseminated internationally in the early part of the 20th century. It played a key part in popularizing belief in an international Jewish conspiracy.

Distillations of the work were assigned by some German teachers, as if factual, to be read by German schoolchildren after the Nazis came to power in 1933, despite having been exposed as fraudulent by the British newspaper *The Times* in 1921 and the German *Frankfurter Zeitung* in 1924. **It remains widely available in numerous languages**, in print and on the Internet, and continues to be presented by neofascist, fundamentalist and antisemitic groups as a genuine document. It has been described as "probably the most influential work of antisemitism ever written"—https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Protocols_of_the_Elders_of_Zion

the Bible—the best-selling book in the world during the 1920s. In the United States, **Henry Ford sponsored its publication.** It has been printed in numerous languages, and till today has global distribution.

Even today on the streets of America, whispers can be heard: "Jews control Hollywood ... Jews control the media ... Israel gets too much foreign aid, etc."

Every American Jew has heard the question posed: "If the United States and Israel went to war, on whose side would you fight?" It's a good question to ponder ...

4. (v. 10) וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ—*And wage war against us.* When Egypt was attacked by an invasion led by **Zepho the son of Elifaz, the grandson of Esau**, it was saved by the intervention of the Jews. Instead of being grateful, this event alarmed the Egyptians because they felt intimidated by the military power which the Jews demonstrated (*Sefer HaYashar*).
- a. In the Hebrew Bible, Zephon was a son of Eliphaz (Esau's eldest son). According to the book of Genesis, his brothers were Omar, Teman, Gatam, Kenaz and Amalek. He is mentioned in Genesis 36:11. According to the legend quoted in Jossipon, he was captured by the military forces of Joseph and imprisoned, later serving as a general for Kittim. According to this account, **he became a Latin King in Latium which was the area where Rome was to be founded later along the Tiber river.** King Zepho son of Eliphaz was called Janus Saturnus by his subjects.⁷
5. (v. 10) וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ—*And go up from the land.* Despite his hostility toward them Pharaoh did not want the Children of Israel to leave his land. He feared their might and prosperity and **he dreaded the consequences their departure would bring.** And so while opposing their emigration, he sought to sap their strength and vigor.
- A review of world history shows that those countries who were hosts to the exiled Jewish nation rose to the ranks of world power. This was the case for many nations in Asia, Africa, Europe and America. The departure or the eviction of the Jews from a country frequently marked the beginning of that nation's decline.
- The *Zohar* touches on this principle by pointing out that the Egyptian slavery began after a new king arose in Egypt (v. 8). **The term arose implies a rise in greatness for Pharaoh as a result of the Jewish peoples presence.** Pharaoh apparently sensed this truth and for that reason wanted the Jews to remain in his land.

a. Genesis 30:25-27 (NKJ)

²⁵And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. ²⁶"Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you." ²⁷And Laban said to him, "Please *stay*, if I have found favor in your eyes, **for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake.**"

b. Genesis 39:2-5

²The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When **his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did**, ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. ⁵From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. **The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had**, both in the house and in the field.

6. (v. 11) לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוּ בְּסִבְלָתָם—*In order to afflict it with their burdens.* By forcing the Jews to do exhausting tasks, such as building cities [and probably pyramids too], Pharaoh hoped to wear out the Jews physically, thereby curtailing their reproductive vigor ... However, the Egyptians discovered that these hardships did not produce the desired effect. For the more they afflicted the Israelites, the more they multiplied. The physical strength of the Jew seemed inextinguishable.

Next, Pharaoh increased their labor, by allowing Egyptians to force Jews to do any type of work. They became common laborers and were subjected to crushing harshness. However, even though they were beaten, poorly fed and treated as common slaves, their numbers continued to grow at an extraordinary rate. It was then that Pharaoh decided on the strategy of using the Hebrew midwives to kill the male newborns (*Ramban*).

a. Numbers 22:1-6

¹Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. ²Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, ³and Moab was terrified **because there were so many people.** Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. ⁴The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, "This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field." So Balak ... who was king of Moab at that time, ⁵sent messengers to summon Balaam ... (from) his na-

⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zephon_\(angel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zephon_(angel))

tive land. Balak said: "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. ⁶Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed."

b. Acts 7:17-22

¹⁷"As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. ¹⁸Then 'a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.' ¹⁹He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die. ²⁰"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. ²¹When he was placed outside, Pharaoh's daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. ²²Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and **was powerful in speech and action.**

7. (v. 12) וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֶנּוּ אֹתוֹ בֶּן יִרְבֵּה—*But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase.* Maharal⁸ explains that the Divine blessing increases in proportion to physical weakness. This is an important principle in Israel's existence. The history of Israel's miseries and greatness starts with this truth. **Israel is sustained by Hashem's direct care, not by ordinary physical and material strength.** Its destiny is a striking manifestation of the Divine plan, and demonstrates the reality of the miraculous on this earth (*Gevuros Hashem* [The Heroism of HaShem] 5:12).

a. Deuteronomy 4:37-40

³⁷Because he loved your ancestors and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt **by his Presence and his great strength**, ³⁸to drive out before you nations greater and stronger than you and to bring you into their land to give it to you for your inheritance, as it is today. ³⁹Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. ⁴⁰Keep his decrees and commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and your children after you and that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you for all time.

b. Hosea 1:6-7

⁶Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means "not loved"), for **I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them.** ⁷**Yet I will show love to Judah; and I will save them - not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but I, the LORD their God, will save them."**

c. Psalm 33:16-22

¹⁶No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. ¹⁷**A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.** ¹⁸But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, ¹⁹to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine. ²⁰We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. ²¹In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. ²²May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you.

d. Psalm 44:1-3

¹For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A *maskil*. We have heard it with our ears, O God; our ancestors have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. ²With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our ancestors; you crushed the peoples and made our ancestors flourish. ³**It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them.**

e. 2Corinthians 1:8-11

⁸We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But **this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God**, who raises the dead. ¹⁰He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

8 (v. 13) וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ—*The Egyptians enslaved the Children of Israel with crushing harshness.* In the Zohar R' Shimon bar Yochai explains that **the harsh experience of the Israelites in Egypt was anecessary condition to enable them to grow from a small and fragile nucleus of seventy souls into a great nation.** While they were still few in number they could easily have gotten lost in their populous

8 Judah Loew ben Bezalel (c. 1520-1609), also known as Rabbi Loew, the Maharal of Prague or simply the Maharal (the Hebrew acronym of "*Moreinu ha-Rav Loew*," 'Our Teacher, Rabbi Loew'). He was an important Talmudic scholar, Jewish mystic, and philosopher who, for most of his life, served as a leading rabbi in the cities of Mikulov in Moravia and Prague in Bohemia.

surroundings. It was for this reason that Hashem brought them to Egypt, a land whose cruel people detested them. The Egyptians reduced them to a state of enslavement and scorned any union with their sons and daughters. The Children of Israel then withdrew into themselves and remained faithful to their covenant with Hashem. Thus, **it was the crushing harshness that enabled them to survive as a nation in the iron furnace of Egypt** (see Deuteronomy 4:20). In contrast, their contemporaries, the Canaanites, sunk to such a low level of immorality that their destruction became inevitable.

a. Deuteronomy 4:20

²⁰But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you **out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.**

b. 1Peter 2:9

⁹But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him **who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.**