

## Exodus as Literature:

- Chapters 1 and 2: Emphasis on female fertility (*raba* used many times) and slavery (bd pronounced *abad* or *ebed*).
- Catalog of women and other female professionals (prophets, musicians, drummers, wise women, mourners, prophets, midwives, wet nurses—contracts have been found) and relatives who will assist Moses through guile or professional expertise:
  - Shiprah and Puah, the Hebrew (*Hapiru* or “outsider”) midwives (note that they are named, whereas Pharaoh is not); midwives rewarded with increase (households)
  - Moses’s mother, Jochebed or “Yahweh is Glory” (possibly a Levite priestess)
  - Moses’s sister (Miriam)
  - Daughter of Pharaoh
  - Seven daughters of Reuel by the well, whom he “delivers” or “redeems”
  - Zipporah who later “delivers” Moses from God (Midianite Priestess?)
  - Mention of Aaron’s wife, mother Jochebed (“Yahweh is Glory”), daughter in law by name
  - Moses and Gershom have a sacred pedigree through Midianite and Levite women
- Hebrews’ cries (Zawak) and God’s notice 2:23-25 (Zakar) reciprocal
- Moses’s defense of Hebrew and Reuel’s daughters (ngp) echoed in Yahweh’s assaults (blow, strike) on Pharaoh (ngp)
- Symmetry and reversals (First-born in chapter one revisited as “affliction” or “plague” in chapter 12)

## Exodus Notes:

- Exodus events unverified. Probably around 1300 BCE. Difference between other early legends—People of Israel come off badly, seem helpless and downright lazy. This makes the story unique among nation-building legends.
- Legends— orphan, changeling. Sargon became pre-eminent ruler of Egypt. Earlier Egyptian attempt at reform by worshipping sun god—first case of monotheism.
- Other characters—Jethro, Aaron, Zipporah, Pharaoh (Ramses II), Aaron, comes from Priestly version—emphasis on role of priest. Idea that Moses is “slow of speech.”
- Jethro, priest of Midian—perhaps the origin of the name JHWE (Yahweh) Priestly version insists this was first revelation of God’s name; previously known as El, Elohim, El Shaddai.
- Two revelations of name 3.13-15; 6:1-18
- Signs and wonders: Ten blows or strikes (compiled by redactors to create a holy number.) Probably a result of a series of related natural disasters, beginning with volcanic activity. Ten miracles—mostly magic tricks familiar to Egyptians. Growing up in Pharaoh’s household, Moses would have learned these.
- Passover—Yahweh as Angel of death. Probably a much later ceremony, attributed by Priestly author to time of Exodus.
- Red Sea— mistranslation of “Yam Suf” or Reed Sea. Events could be explained as a parting of the reeds by a strong wind. In J’s version, Israelites don’t enter the sea; they just allow the Egyptians to chase them in and drown. Also translated “Sea of End”—primeval battle with Sky God (El) and Sea God.
- Poem about the Red Sea—origins in a mythical confrontation of God with the Sea. Rahab (sea-dragon-god) is identified with Pharaoh or Egypt.
- Miriam’s prophecy—the oldest fragment in Exodus
- Theophany—burning bush, receiving of the decalogue. Core of the Torah.
- Significance of numbers: 10 plagues, 10 commandments, 7+1 (completion), 12 (stands for Israel), 70 (stands for everyone else). Exaggeration—maybe 5000 people at most came out of Egypt.

Primeval Chaos. The phrase "deep water" (1:2) signifies not just bottomless oceans, but the threatening waters of Mesopotamian lore that ancient peoples always feared would be their undoing. The Hebrew word behind "deep water" is equivalent to the Akkadian word *tiamat* which names the ocean goddess in the Mesopotamian creation story, called the *Enuma Elish* ([see below](#)). A variety of ancient myths describe a cosmic battle at the beginning of time. The sea monster is variously called Sea (Yamm), River (Nahar), Serpent (Lotan/Leviathan), Dragon (Tannin), or Arrogance (Rahab). After a battle, the high god subdues and restrains the villain of primeval chaos and so achieves victory. The description of the move from chaos to cosmos in Genesis 1 is not described as battle, but many authorities find tell-tale remnants of the cosmic myth here and elsewhere in biblical literature (see [McCurely 1983](#) and [Batto 1992](#)).

## Signs of the conflict between The Sky-God and the Waters in the Bible

- [Job 26](#)
- [Psalms 74.12-15](#)
- [Psalms 89.8-11](#)
- [Isaiah 27.1](#)
- [Isaiah 51.9-10](#)
- Passages which may reflect the myth transferred to another context:
  - [Ezekiel 29.2-5](#)
  - [Ezekiel 32.2-4](#)
  - Revelation 12 and 13.

See also: Bernard F. Batto *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville 1992). Foster R. McCurley *Ancient Myths and Biblical Faith: Scriptural Transformations* (Philadelphia 1983).

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## **Exodus Chapter 14 (the three authors). Translated by Richard Elliott Friedman**

### **J, E, and P in Exodus**

Unknown (deuteronomistic?) author: ten commandments (part 1)

- J: In Yahwist version, Moses climbs Mt Sinai; No Aaron; Miriam is unrelated priestess (sister is mentioned but not identified); ancient "Song of Miriam" (Exodus 15), 2nd version of commandments (34:14)
- E: In Elohist version, Moses climbs Mt. Horeb; Aaron and Miriam are siblings but no relation to Moses; stories of child sacrifice, special revelation of God's name (3:9-18); story of plagues (alternates with P); first story of tablets
- P: In Priestly version, Aaron and Moses are siblings; emphasis on covenant and God's constancy; story of plagues (alternates with E); long, dreadful lists of blueprints for the tabernacle
- R: Redactor makes connections and harmonizes when necessary

### **J (an early source written by a layperson, approx. 900 BCE. Calls God Yahweh "YHWH" throughout; uses southern place names)**

5 And it was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled. 6 And he hitched his chariot and took his people with him. And Egypt pursued them. And the children of Israel raised their eyes, and here was Egypt coming after them, and they were very afraid.

13 And Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. Stand still and see YHWH's salvation that He'll do for you today. For, as you've seen Egypt today, you'll never see them again, ever. 14 YHWH will fight for you, and you'll keep quiet!"

And the column of cloud went from in front of them and stood behind them. And there was the cloud and darkness [for the Egyptians], while it [the column of fire] lit the night [for the Israelites], and one did not come near the other all night. And YHWH drove back the sea with a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry ground. And it was in the morning watch, and YHWH gazed at Egypt's camp through a column of fire and cloud and threw Egypt's camp into tumult

And Egypt said, "Let me flee from Israel, because YHWH is fighting for them against Egypt!"

And the sea went back to its strong flow toward morning, and Egypt was fleeing toward it. And YHWH tossed the Egyptians into the sea.

And the sea went back to its strong flow toward morning, and Egypt was fleeing toward it. And YHWH tossed the Egyptians into the sea.

30 And YHWH saved Israel from Egypt's hand that day. And Israel saw Egypt dead on the seashore, 31 and Israel saw the big hand that YHWH had used against Egypt, and the people feared YHWH, and they trusted in YHWH and in Moses His servant.

**E (an early source written by a member of the northern priesthood; uses northern place names; includes multiple stories of child sacrifice; uses “God” or “Elohim” until the special revelation of YHWH’s name.)**

And the heart of Pharaoh and his servants changed toward the people. And they said, "What is this that we've done, that we let Israel go from serving us?!" And he took six hundred chosen chariots-and all the chariotry of Egypt-and officers over all of it.

11 And they said to Moses, "Was it because of an absence-none!-of graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?! What is this that you've done to us to bring us out of Egypt? 12 Isn't this the thing that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying: Stop from us! And let's serve Egypt. Because serving Egypt is better for us than our dying in the wilderness!"

And the angel of God who was going in front of the camp of Israel moved and went behind them. 20 And it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. 25 and turned its chariots' wheel so that it drove it with heaviness.

**P (a later source, near or during Babylonian exile; written by a priest; emphasizes importance of Aaron, Priesthood, Sabbath, and correct observance of Torah)**

8 And YHWH strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued the children of Israel. And the children of Israel were going out with a high hand. And they taught up to them, camping by the sea-every chariot horse of Pharaoh and his horsemen and his army-at Pi-Hahiroth, in front of Baal-Zephon. 10 And Pharaoh came close! And the children of Israel cried out to YHWH.

15 And YHWH said to Moses, "Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the children of Israel that they should move! 16 And you, lift your staff and reach your hand out over the sea-and split it! And the children of Israel will come through the sea on the dry ground. 17 And I, here, I'm strengthening Egypt's heart, and they'll come after them, and I'll be glorified against Pharaoh and against all of his army, against his chariots and against his horsemen. 18 And Egypt will know that I am YHWH when I'm glorified against Pharaoh, against his chariots and against his horsemen."

21 And Moses reached his hand out over the sea. And the water was split. 22 And the children of Israel came through the sea on the dry ground. And the water was a wall to them at their right and at their left. 23 And Egypt pursued and came after them, every horse of Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen, through the sea.

26 And YHWH said to Moses, "Reach your hand out over the sea, and the water will go back over Egypt, over his chariots and over his horsemen."

27 And Moses reached his hand out over the sea. 28 and the waters went back and covered the chariots and the horsemen-all of Pharaoh's army who were coming after them in the sea. Not even one of them was left. 29 And the children of Israel had gone on the dry ground through the sea, and the water had been a wall to them at their right and at their left.

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## Legend of Sargon

Sargon, the mighty king, king of Agade, am I.  
MY mother was a *changeling*<sup>1</sup>, my father I knew not.  
The brother(s) of my father *loved* the hills.  
My city is Azupiranu, which is situated on the banks of the Euphrates.  
*My changeling* mother conceived me, in secret she bore me.  
She set me in a basket of rushes, with bitumen she sealed  
My lid.  
She cast me into the river which rose not (over) me,  
The river bore me up and carried me to Akki, the  
drawer of water.  
Akki, the drawer of water lifted me out as he dipped his  
e[w]er.  
Akki, the drawer of water, [took me] as his son  
(and) reared me.  
Akki, the drawer of water, appointed me as his gardener,  
While I was a gardener, Ishtar granted me (her) love,  
And for four and [ ... ] years I exercised kingship,  
The black-headed [people] I ruled, I gov[erned];  
Mighty [moun]tains with chip-axes of bronze I con-  
quered,  
The upper ranges I scaled,  
The lower ranges I [trav]ersed,  
The sea [lan]ds three times I circled.  
Dilmun my [hand] cap[tured],  
[To] the great Der I [went up], I [ . . . ],  
[ . . . ] I altered and [ . . . ].  
Whatever king may come up after me,  
[ . . . ]  
Let him r[ule, let him govern] the black-headed  
[peo]ple;  
[Let him conquer] mighty [mountains] with chip-axe[s  
of bronze],  
[Let] him scale the upper ranges,  
[Let him traverse the lower ranges],  
Let him circle the sea [lan]ds three times!  
[Dilmun let his hand capture],  
Let him go up [to] the great Der and [ . . . ]!  
[ . . . ] from my city, Aga[de ... ]  
[ . . . ] . . . [ . . . ].  
(Remainder broken away.)

### Source:

From: George A. Barton, *Archaeology and The Bible*, 3rd Ed., (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1920), p. 310.