

What the Bible is Not Confused About: The House of Bondage

Source Sheet by Aaron Asher aaronisaacasher@gmail.com

Exodus 1:8-9

(8) A new king arose over Egypt who *did not know Joseph*. (9) And he said to his people, “Look, ***the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.***”

שמות א' ח-ט'

(ח) וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יֹסֵף: (ט)
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עִם-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעֲצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ:

When Exodus says that a new king arose who did not know Joseph, the Torah is doing more than explaining Pharaoh's ignorance. It is activating the reader's memory. Pharaoh does not know Joseph, but we do. And because we do, we are supposed to ask what Joseph's Egypt had become before this new king ever appears. What system did Joseph build? What kind of Pharaoh did that system empower? What world did this king inherit?

The Torah is asking us to read the beginning of Exodus through the legacy of Joseph.

Genesis 47:11-28

(11) So Joseph settled his father and his brothers, **giving them holdings in the choicest part of the land of Egypt**, in the region of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. (12) **Joseph sustained his father, and his brothers, and all his father's household with bread, down to the little ones.** (13) Now there was no bread in all the world, for the famine was very severe; both the

בראשית מ"ז:יא-כ"ח

(יא) וַיּוֹשֶׁב יוֹסֵף אֶת-אָבִיו
וְאֶת-אֶחָיו וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם אַחְזָה
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּמִיטַב הָאָרֶץ
בְּאֶרֶץ רַעַמְסֵס כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
פַּרְעֹה: (יב) וַיִּכְלְכַל יוֹסֵף
אֶת-אָבִיו וְאֶת-אֶחָיו וְאֶת
כָּל-בֵּית אָבִיו לֶחֶם לְפִי הַטָּף:
(יג) וְלֶחֶם אֵין בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ
כִּי-כָבֵד הָרָעַב מְאֹד וַתִּלָּה אֶרֶץ

land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine. (14) Joseph gathered in all the money that was to be found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, as payment for the rations that were being procured, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's palace. (15) And when the money gave out in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us bread, lest we die before your very eyes; for the money is gone!" (16) And Joseph said, "Bring your livestock, and I will sell to you against your livestock, if the money is gone." (17) So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, for the stocks of sheep and cattle, and the asses; thus he provided them with bread that year in exchange for all their livestock. (18) And when that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We cannot hide from my lord that, with all the money and animal stocks consigned to my lord, nothing is left at my lord's disposal save our persons and our farmland. (19) Let us not perish before your eyes, both we and our land. Take us and our land in exchange for bread, **and we with our land will be serfs/slaves to Pharaoh;** provide the seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become a waste." (20) So Joseph gained

מִצְרַיִם וְאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָב:
 (יד) וַיִּלְקַט יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־הַכֶּסֶף
 הַנִּמְצָא בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם וּבְאֶרֶץ
 כְּנָעַן בְּשֹׁבֵר אֲשֶׁר־הֵם שֹׁבְרִים
 וַיָּבֵא יוֹסֵף אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף בֵּיתָה
 פְּרָעֹה: (טו) וַיְתֵם הַכֶּסֶף מֵאֶרֶץ
 מִצְרַיִם וּמֵאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ
 כָּל־מִצְרַיִם אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר
 הִבֵּה־לָּנוּ לֶחֶם וְלָמָּה נָמוֹת נִגְדָּךְ
 כִּי אֲפֹס כֶּסֶף: (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף
 הֲבֵן מִקְנֵיכֶם וְאֶתְנֶה לָכֶם
 בְּמִקְנֵיכֶם אִם־אֲפֹס כֶּסֶף: (יז)
 וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵיהֶם אֶל־יוֹסֵף
 וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף לֶחֶם בְּסוּסִים
 וּבְמִקְנֵה הַצֹּאן וּבְמִקְנֵה הַבְּקָר
 וּבְחֹמְרִים וַיִּנְהֵלֶם בַּלֶּחֶם
 בְּכָל־מִקְנֵיהֶם בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא: (יח)
 וַתֵּתֶם הַשָּׁנָה הַהִוא וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵלָיו
 בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיית וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ
 לֹא־נִכְחַד מְאֹדָנִי כִּי אִם־תֵּתֶם
 הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל־אֲדֹנָי
 לֹא נִשְׂאָר לִפְנֵי אֲדֹנָי בְּלִתִּי
 אִם־גּוֹיֵתָנוּ וְאֲדַמְתָּנוּ: (יט) לָמָּה
 נָמוֹת לְעֵינֶיךָ גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ גַּם
 אֲדַמְתָּנוּ קָנָה־אֶתְנוּ וְאֶת־אֲדַמְתָּנוּ
 בַּלֶּחֶם וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲדַמְתָּנוּ
 עֲבָדִים לְפְרָעֹה וְתַן־זֶרַע וְנַחֲיָה
 וְלֹא נָמוֹת וְהֵאֲדַמָּה לֹא תִשָּׂם:
 (כ) וַיִּקֶּן יוֹסֵף אֶת־כָּל־אֲדַמַּת

possession of all the farm land of Egypt for Pharaoh, all the Egyptians having sold their fields because the famine was too much for them; thus the land passed over to Pharaoh. (21) **And he removed the population town by town, from one end of Egypt's border to the other.** (22) Only the land of the priests he did not take over, for the priests had an allotment from Pharaoh, and they lived off the allotment which Pharaoh had made to them; therefore they did not sell their land. (23) Then Joseph said to the people, "Whereas I have this day acquired you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. (24) And when harvest comes, you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be yours as seed for the fields and as food for you and those in your households, and as nourishment for your children." (25) And they said, "You have saved our lives! We are grateful to my lord, and we shall be serfs to Pharaoh." (26) **And Joseph made it into a land law in Egypt, until this day, that a fifth should be Pharaoh's; only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh's.** (27) *Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were fertile and increased greatly.* (28) Jacob lived

מִצְרַיִם לְפָרְעָה כִּי־מָכְרוּ מִצְרַיִם
אִישׁ שָׂדֵהוּ כִּי־חִזַּק עֲלֵהֶם הָרָעַב
וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ לְפָרְעָה: (כא)
וְאֶת־הָעָם הֶעֱבִיר אֹתוֹ לְעָרִים
מִקְצֵה גְבוּל־מִצְרַיִם וְעַד־קִצְהוֹ:
(כב) רַק אֲדָמַת הַכֹּהֲנִים לֹא קָנָה
כִּי חֵק לַכֹּהֲנִים מֵאֵת פְּרֹעֶה
וְאָכְלוּ אֶת־חֶקֶם אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם
פְּרֹעֶה עַל־כֵּן לֹא מָכְרוּ
אֶת־אֲדָמָתָם: (כג) וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף
אֶל־הָעָם הֵן קָנִיתִי אֶתְכֶם הַיּוֹם
וְאֶת־אֲדָמָתְכֶם לְפָרְעָה הָאֵל־לְכֶם
זֶרַע וּזְרַעְתֶּם אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה: (כד)
וְהָיָה בַתְּבוּאֹת וּנְתַתֶּם חֲמִישִׁית
לְפָרְעָה וְאַרְבַּע הַיְדֹת יִהְיֶה לְכֶם
לְזֶרַע הַשָּׂדֶה וְלֹאֲכַלְכֶם וְלֹאֲשֶׁר
בְּבֵיתְכֶם וְלֹאֲכֹל לְטַפְּכֶם: (כה)
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הֶחֱתַנּוּ נִמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינַי
אֲדֹנָי וְהָיִינוּ עֲבָדִים לְפָרְעָה:
(כו) וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ יוֹסֵף לְחֵק
עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה עַל־אֲדָמַת מִצְרַיִם
לְפָרְעָה לְחֵמֶשׁ רַק אֲדָמַת
הַכֹּהֲנִים לְבָדָם לֹא הָיְתָה
לְפָרְעָה: (כז) וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וַיֵּאֲחֹז בָּהּ
וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ מְאֹד: (כח) וַיְחִי
יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂר
שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יָמֵי־יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חֲלָיו
שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וְאַרְבַּעַיִם וּמֵאָת

seventeen years in the land of Egypt,
so that the span of Jacob's life came
to one hundred and forty-seven
years.

שָׁנָה:

Genesis 47 is not just a famine story. It is the transformation of Egypt.

And we should be careful: the text does not present Joseph as maliciously stripping Egypt for its own sake. The people are starving. The world is starving. Joseph gives them bread, and they are grateful to be alive. When they say, "You have saved our lives," the Torah lets that gratitude stand. Joseph really does preserve life.

But the way he preserves life changes Egypt forever. First the money enters Pharaoh's house. Then the livestock. Then the land. Then the people themselves. By the end, Pharaoh owns the land, the people have been relocated, and a permanent fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh.

That is not the same as the brutal slavery Israel later experiences in Exodus. But it is also not ordinary freedom. From this point forward, the average Egyptian no longer owns his land. He no longer owns his animals. He no longer controls the source of his grain. He does not even fully control where he lives, because the population has been moved from one end of Egypt to the other. Survival has been secured, but independence has been lost.

And while this is happening, Joseph's family is treated differently. Israel is settled in Goshen, given holdings, sustained with bread, and allowed to multiply. The priests keep their land because they live from Pharaoh's allotment. Israel keeps its place because Joseph protects them.

So by the end of Genesis, Egypt has become a country where Pharaoh owns almost everything, while Israel remains a protected, landholding family inside Pharaoh's kingdom.

That is the world the new king inherits.

Genesis 50:18-26

(18) His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, “We are prepared to be your slaves.” (19) But Joseph said to them, “Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God? (20) Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people. (21) And so, fear not. **I will sustain you and your dependents.**” Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them... (26) Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

בראשית נ"י:ח-כ"ו

(יח) וַיֵּלְכוּ גַם־אָחִיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו
וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנְנּוּ לְךָ לְעֲבָדִים: (יט)
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אֶל־תִּירְאוּ כִּי
הִתַּחַת אֱלֹקִים אָנִי: (כ) וְאַתֶּם
חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹקִים חֲשַׁבְּהָ
לְטֹבָה לְמַעַן עֲשֶׂה כִּי־וָה הַזֶּה
לְהַחֲיִיתַת עַם־רַב: (כא) וְעַתָּה
אֶל־תִּירְאוּ אֲנֹכִי אֶכְלָל אֶתְכֶם
וְאֶת־טַפְכֶם וַיְנַחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר
עַל־לִבָּם: ... (כו) וַיָּמַת יוֹסֵף
בֶּן־מֵאָה וָעֶשְׂרִי שָׁנָיִם וַיַּחְנֹטוּ אוֹתוֹ
וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֵרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

The brothers once sold Joseph into Egypt. Now, through Joseph, Egypt itself has been sold to Pharaoh.

That does not mean Joseph is acting with malice. Genesis presents him as someone who preserves life. But the irony is hard to ignore: the brother who was sold into slavery becomes the administrator of a system in which an entire country become avadim/slaves to Pharaoh.

And even Joseph's final words of comfort carry a warning. He tells his brothers, "I will sustain you and your children." That sounds reassuring, but it also means they still need to be sustained. Their security is not independent. Their survival is tied to Joseph's power, Joseph's position, and Joseph's ability to protect them inside Pharaoh's Egypt.

So the question hanging over the end of Genesis is not only whether Joseph forgave his brothers. The question is: what happens when Joseph is gone? Can Israel remain free inside a country where Pharaoh owns the land, controls the grain, relocates the population, and has already turned Egypt into a servant-state? What happens when a new Pharaoh arrives who doesn't know Joseph?

Exodus 9:19-20

(19) Therefore, order your livestock and everything you have in the open brought under shelter; every human and beast that is found outside, not having been brought indoors, shall perish when the hail comes down upon them!” (20) Those among Pharaoh’s courtiers/**slaves** who feared the LORD’s word brought their **slaves** and livestock indoors to safety;

שמות ט:י"ט-כ'

(יט) וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח הָעֹז אֶת־מִקְנֶיךָ
וְאֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לְךָ בַּשָּׂדֶה
כָּל־הָאָדָם וְהַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר־יִמְצָא
בַּשָּׂדֶה וְלֹא יֵאסֵף הַבַּיְתָה וְיָרַד
עֲלֵהֶם הַבָּרָד וּמָתוּ: (כ) הִירָא
אֶת־דַּבְּרֵי יְקוֹק מִעֲבָדֵי פְרַעֲוֹ
הֵנִיס אֶת־עַבְדָּיו וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ
אֶל־הַבָּתִּים:

Exodus is not describing a simple society made up of free Egyptians on one side and enslaved Israelites on the other. Pharaoh has avadim/slaves, and some of Pharaoh’s avadim/slaves have avadim/slaves of their own. Some of those servants fear the word of God and bring their households, servants, and animals inside.

That means the “house of bondage” is layered. It includes Pharaoh at the top, servants beneath him, servants beneath them, livestock, households, and vulnerable dependents. Egypt is a world ordered through hierarchy, ownership, and fear.

And that is exactly the kind of world Genesis 47 prepared us to recognize. Once Egypt becomes a country where the people and the land are avadim to Pharaoh, bondage does not only exist at the bottom. It becomes the organizing structure of the whole society.

Exodus 12:35-49

(35) The Israelites had done Moses' bidding and borrowed from the Egyptians objects of silver and gold, and clothing. (36) And the LORD had disposed the Egyptians favorably toward the people, and they let them have their request; thus they stripped the Egyptians. ... (38) **Moreover, a mixed multitude went up with them**, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. (39) And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. (40) The length of time that the Israelites lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years; (41) at the end of the four hundred and thirtieth year, to the very day, *all the ranks of the LORD departed from the land of Egypt.* (42) That was for the LORD a night of vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt; that same night is the LORD's, one of vigil for all the children of Israel throughout the ages. (43) The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is the law of the passover offering: No foreigner shall eat of it. (44) But any householder's purchased male slave may eat of it

שמות י"ב:ל"ה-מ"ט

(לה) וּבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְדַבַּר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וְכְלֵי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת: (לו) וַיְקַוּוּ נָתַן אֶת־חֵן הָעַם בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וַיִּשְׁאַלוּם וַיִּנְצְלוּ אֶת־מִצְרַיִם: ... (לח) וַיְגַם־עָרַב רַב עֲלֵה אֹתָם וַצֵּאוּן וּבָקֵר מִקְנֵה כְּבֵד מְאֹד: (לט) וַיֹּאפּוּ אֶת־הַבָּצֵק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עֲגַת מִצּוֹת כִּי לֹא חֵמֶץ כִּי־גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהַתְמַהֵמֶה וַיְגַם־צֹדֵה לֹא־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם: (מ) וּמוֹשֵׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: (מא) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה וַיְהִי בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יֵצְאוּ כָּל־צְבָאוֹת יְקוּק מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם: (מב) לַיִל שְׁמַרְיִם הוּא לְיְקוּק לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הוּא־הַלְיָלָה הַזֶּה לְיְקוּק שְׁמַרְיִם לְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְדוֹרֹתָם: {פ} (מג) וַיֹּאמֶר יְקוּק אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן זֹאת חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח כָּל־בֶּן־נֶכֶד לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ: (מד) וְכָל־עֶבֶד אִישׁ מִקְנֵת־כֶּסֶף וּמִלְתָּה אֹתוֹ אִזּוֹ יֹאכַל בּוֹ: (מה) תוֹשֵׁב וְשִׁכִּיר לֹא־יֹאכַל בּוֹ:

once he has been circumcised. (45)
 No foreigner or hired laborer shall
 eat of it. ... (47) The whole
 community of Israel shall offer it.
 (48) If a male stranger who dwells
 with you would offer the passover to
 the LORD, all his males must be
 circumcised; then he shall be
 admitted to offer it; he shall then be
 as a citizen of the country. But no
 uncircumcised man may eat of it.
 (49) There shall be one law for the
 citizen and for the stranger who
 dwells among you.

(מו) ... כָּל־עֵדֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲשׂוּ
 אֹתוֹ: (מח) וְכִי־יִגֹּר אֶתְךָ גֵר
 וַעֲשֵׂה פֶסַח לִיקוּק הַמּוֹל לְךָ
 כָּל־זָכוֹר וְאִל יִקְרַב לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ וְהָיָה
 כְּאִזְרַח הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־עֶרְל לֹא־יֵאָכֵל
 בּוֹ: (מט) תּוֹרַה אַחַת יְהִיָּה
 לְאִזְרַח וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

Israel leaves Egypt, but Israel does not leave alone. A mixed multitude goes up with them, along with abundant livestock. The text also expands the language and says that “all the ranks of the LORD” left Egypt. So the Exodus is not only removing one family from Pharaoh’s house. It is pulling a whole collection of people, households, servants, strangers, and animals out of Egypt’s slave society.

That means the Torah now has to ask: who belongs to this redeemed people? Who is included in this night? Who can move from Pharaoh’s house into God’s house?

That is why the Passover laws appear here and aren’t random. The Torah begins sorting the human categories that came out of Egypt: foreigner, purchased slave, hired worker, stranger, native-born. These are exactly the kinds of categories we would expect after leaving a layered house of bondage.

But the Torah’s answer is not simply bloodline. A stranger can enter. A purchased slave can eat once circumcised. There can be “one law” for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you.

The Exodus has pulled many kinds of people out of Egypt. Passover begins the work of defining how those people can become one covenantal community under God.

Exodus 20:2-11

(2) I the ETERNAL am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **the house of bondage:**(3) You shall have no other gods besides Me. (4) You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the ETERNAL your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, (6) but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments. (7) You shall not swear falsely by the name of the ETERNAL your God; for GOD will not clear one who swears falsely by that name. (8) Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a sabbath of the ETERNAL your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or the stranger who is within your settlements. (11) For in six days GOD

שמות כ:ב-י"א

(ב) אָנֹכִי יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים: (ג) לֹא־יִהְיֶה־לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־פְּנֵי: (ד) לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה־לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ: (ה) לֹא־תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא פֹקֵד עֵוֹן אָבֹת עַל־בְּנֵים עַל־שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים לְשָׁנָאִי: (ו) וְעָשֵׂה חֶסֶד לְאֵלֶפֶיךָ לְאַהֲבֵי וּלְשֹׁמְרֵי מִצְוֹתַי: {ס} (ז) לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־שֵׁם־יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׂוּא כִּי לֹא יִנְקָה יְקוֹק אֶת־אֶשְׁרֵי־שָׂא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ לְשׂוּא: {פ} (ח) זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ: (ט) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלֶאכֶתֶךָ: (י) וְיוֹם הַשַּׁבְּעִי שַׁבָּת וְלִיקוֹק אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־מְלֶאכֶה אַתָּה וּבְנֶדְוֹבֶתֶךָ עֲבָדֶיךָ וְאִמָּתֶךָ וּבַהֲמָתֶךָ וּגְרָדֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: (יא) כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְקוֹק אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיִּנַּח בַּיּוֹם

made heaven and earth and
sea—and all that is in them—and
then rested on the seventh day;
therefore GOD blessed the sabbath
day and hallowed it.

הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בִּרְךְ יְקוּק
{ס} אֶת־יְוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ:

When the Ten Commandments begin, God does not introduce Himself as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” That would have been true, but it would not have been enough for this moment. The people standing at Sinai are not only a bloodline family anymore. Israel has left Egypt with servants, strangers, a mixed multitude, and livestock. The Exodus has created a people larger than genealogy.

God also does not begin by saying, “I am the Creator of heaven and earth.” That too would have been true, and Shabbat will soon point back to creation. But creation is universal. God could say that to anyone. It does not name the specific experience that has brought this people to this mountain.

So God gives the introduction that fits the situation: “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage.”

That phrase is not generic. It names the whole structure the Torah has been showing us. Egypt was not only the place where Israel suffered. It was the place where land, labor, animals, strangers, servants, children, and survival itself could all be gathered under Pharaoh’s control.

And that is why Shabbat appears so quickly. The commandment immediately names every category of life inside Israel’s gates: you, your children, your male and female servants, your animals, and your stranger. No one gets swallowed by endless labor. No one’s body exists only for someone else’s productivity. Even the animals are pulled into rest.

The point is not only that Israelites must rest. The point is that Israel must not rebuild Egypt. A people rescued from the house of bondage has to become a different kind of house.

In Pharaoh's house, power moves downward and consumes everything beneath it. In God's house, rest moves downward and protects everything beneath it.

The God who breaks open the house of bondage commands Israel to build a world where bondage cannot become the organizing principle again.

Bekhor Shor, Exodus 20:2

“Who brought you out of the land of Egypt” — and it is better and more fitting for you to serve Me than to serve those slaves (the Egyptians).

בכור שור, שמות כ"ב'
אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים
ומוטב ונאה לך לעבוד אותי
מלעבוד אותם עבדים

Bekhor Shor says it plainly: it is better to serve God than to serve “those slaves,” meaning the Egyptians. Egypt is a place where even the masters are servants. Pharaoh's house is bondage all the way down.

Now we can reread Exodus 1 with the background restored. The king who “did not know Joseph” is not just missing a biography. He is missing the moral memory of how Egypt became what it became.

Joseph used Pharaoh's power to preserve life, but that preservation came through a system that swallowed Egypt into Pharaoh's control. Joseph protected his own family from being swallowed by that system in his lifetime, but the hungry mouth of that system remained.

So when Pharaoh turns on Israel, their enslavement is not random. It is measure for measure. The brothers sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Joseph's Egypt then becomes the house of bondage. And in Exodus 1, that house finally turns on the brothers' children.

Exodus 1:7-22

(7) But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and

שמות א'ז'-כ"ב
(ז) וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרְוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ

increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them. (8) A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. (9) And he said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. (10) Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.” (11) So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses. (12) But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites. (13) The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites (14) the various labors that they made them perform. Ruthlessly they made life bitter for them with harsh labor at mortar and bricks and with all sorts of tasks in the field. (15) The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, (16) saying, “When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” (17) The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. (18) So the

וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד
וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם: {פ} (ח)
וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר
לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יֹסֵף: (ט) וַיֹּאמֶר
אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב
וְעַצּוֹם מִמֶּנּוּ: (י) הֲבֵי נִתְחַכְמָה
לֹּ פְּנֵי-יִרְבֵּה וְהִיא כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה
מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם-הוּא
עַל-שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה
מִן-הָאָרֶץ: (יא) וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ עָלָיו
שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנְתּוּ בְּסִבְלָתָם
וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה
אֶת-פְּתֹם וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס: (יב)
וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנֶנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן
יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
(יג) וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֹךְ: (יד) וַיִּמְרֹרוּ
אֶת-חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר
וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל-עֲבֹדָה בַשָּׂדֶה אֶת
כָּל-עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר-עֲבָדוּ בָהֶם
בְּפָרֹךְ: (טו) וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
לְמִיֻּלְדֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שָׁם
הָאֵחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית
פּוּעָה: (טז) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיַלְדֹכֶן
אֶת-הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן
עַל-הָאֲבָנִים אִם-בֵּן הוּא וְהַמִּיתֶן
אֹתוֹ וְאִם-בַּת הוּא וְחִיָּה: (יז)
וַתִּירָאן הַמִּיֻּלְדֹת אֶת-הָאֱלֹקִים
וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵן מֶלֶךְ

king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?” (19) The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth.” (20) And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. (21) And [God] established households for the midwives, because they feared God. (22) Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, “Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחֲיֶינָהוּ אֶת־הַיִּלְדִּים: (יח)
וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם לְמִיֻּלְדֹת
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מִדּוּעַ עָשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר
הַזֶּה וַתַּחֲיֶינָהוּ אֶת־הַיִּלְדִּים: (יט)
וַתֹּאמְרֶינָה הַמִּיֻּלְדֹת אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי
לֹא כַנְשִׁים הֵמָּזְרִית הָעִבְרִית
כִּי־חַיּוֹת הִנֵּה בְטָרִם תָּבוֹא אֵלֵינוּ
הַמִּיֻּלְדֹת וַיִּלְדוּ: (כ)
וַיֵּטֵב אֱלֹקִים לְמִיֻּלְדֹת וַיַּרְבּ הָעָם
וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ מְאֹד: (כא)
וַיְהִי כִי־יִרְאוּ
הַמִּיֻּלְדֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים וַיַּעַשׂ
לָהֶם בָּתִּים: (כב)
וַיִּצְוּ פַרְעֹה
לְכָל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־בֶּן־הַיִּלּוֹד
הַיְאֹרָה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ וְכָל־הַבֵּת
תַּחֲיִיוֹן: {פ}

Now when we reread Exodus the slavery of Israel does not come out of nowhere. Genesis has already shown us how Egypt became Pharaoh's house: the money, the livestock, the land, and finally the people came under royal control. Joseph preserved life, but he also helped build the structure that made Egypt into a house of bondage.

That structure was born in the aftermath of Joseph's sale. The brothers sold Joseph as an eved into Egypt. Then Joseph's Egypt became a land where the people themselves became avadim to Pharaoh. And once Egypt became a house of avadim, the question was always whether Israel could remain free inside it.

For a while, Joseph could sustain them. For a while, Joseph could protect them. For a while, Israel could live in Goshen, hold land, multiply, and remain distinct. But Joseph dies. His generation passes. And a new king arises who does not know Joseph.

That king inherits the house Joseph helped build, but without Joseph's memory, Joseph's gratitude, or Joseph's protection. Pharaoh receives the machinery of

centralized power without the moral restraint of the one who first used it to preserve life. And when he sees Israel multiplying inside that system, he turns the house of bondage against them.

So the Exodus is not only a rescue from one cruel king. It is God breaking open the house that Pharaoh inherited, intensified, and weaponized against Israel.

This is what the Bible is not confused about: slavery in Egypt is not a random interruption in the story. It is the long shadow of Joseph's sale, Egypt's transformation, and Pharaoh's power. The Torah remembers how bondage is built, how it spreads, and how God brings people out

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Aaron Asher