

ABSTRACT

BETWEEN BIBLE AND MIDRASH:
THE STORY OF ABRAM AND SARAI IN EGYPT (GENESIS 12:10–20)
AND THE STORY OF MOSES' BIRTH (EXODUS 2:1–10)

Haim Hayun

In this article I suggest adding the story of the birth of Moses in Egypt (Exod 2:1–10) to the known biblical triangle of sister-wife stories and, more precisely, to the story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt and its echoes in the Book of Genesis (Gen 12:10–20, 20:1–18, 26:1–14). I show the inner-biblical similarities and suggest that the Sages too were aware of the connection among the stories.

The similarities are as follows: danger of death threatens the Hebrew males; Sarai and Moses are both taken to Pharaoh's house; a woman saves the endangered male; Pharaoh and Pharaoh's daughter are unaware of the family relations of the Hebrews and reward the relative who remains outside. However, the details of the story are completely reversed. In the Genesis story the woman is taken to the king's house, while in the story in Exodus the child is taken to the king's house. The erotic tension and the forbidden relations have no trace in the story of Moses and the daughter of Pharaoh, and the focus of the plot makes the similarity almost beyond recognition.

Why then did the author of the later story rely on the earlier one? In my opinion, the author seeks to link between Abram and Sarai, who were the first to descend to Egypt, and Moses who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt. As in many other places in the Hebrew Bible, the author makes use of allusion.

The second part of the article shows that the Sages were aware of the similarity. Thus, the connection between the two biblical stories continued into the world of Midrash.