

# The Exagoge of Ezekiel the Tragedian

A Translation by Will Dilbeck

Moses: When Jacob left Canaan land  
he went down to Egypt having seventy  
souls with him and begot afterward many  
people who were abused and oppressed,  
even in these times have we suffered 5  
at the hands of wicked men and mighty forces.  
For King Pharaoh, seeing our race growing much  
devised much treachery against us,  
torturing men with brickwork and  
the burden of building city towers 10  
by labor from our ill-fated men.  
Then he called for the male offspring of Hebrews  
to be tossed into the deep-flowing river.  
At that very time, the mother who gave birth to me  
hid me three months, as she said, but no longer 15  
could she stay hidden, so she robed me,  
and exposed me along the river bank into the thick and bushy marsh.  
And my sister Miriam was watching nearby.  
Thereafter the daughter of the king with her maidens  
came down to wash clean her youthful skin. 20

And at once when she saw me, she took me into her arms,  
she knew that I was a Hebrew, and then my sister Mariam  
running to the daughter of the king, said,  
“Should I find a nurse quickly for this child from among the Hebrews?”  
She urged her to do so. She went to tell my mother who came quickly 25

and my mother took me into her arms.  
The King’s daughter said, “Woman, nurse this child,  
And I will pay you for it.”  
And she named me Moses, because she 30  
took me from the wet river bank.  
And when the time of my infancy passed,  
Mother brought me to the house of the princess,  
she recounted all and talked to me  
about my lineage and the gifts of God. 35  
Therefore while I was in the time of youth,  
she took it upon herself to give me a royal rearing and instruction  
as if I were her own child.  
And when I passed into adulthood,  
I came out of the royal palace 40  
(For my desire and kingly contrivances brought me out).

And I first saw two men violently scrapping,  
one of them was a Hebrew, the other an Egyptian.  
And seeing that we were alone with no one else around,  
I rescued my brother, but I killed the other one. 45  
I buried him in the sand, so that no one

might see and lay bare the murderous deed.

On the morrow once again I saw two men,  
both were of the same race and they were fighting,

I said: "Why are you striking a weaker man?" 50

He responded, "Who made you our judge  
and magistrate here? Will you kill me,  
as you did that man yesterday?" I was afraid  
and I said, "How did this become known?"

News of everything quickly reached to the king. 55

And Pharaoh thus sought to take my life.

When I heard this, I took flight from his presence  
and now I have wandered to this foreign land.

But I saw these seven virgins. 59

Sepphora: This entire land, stranger, is called Libya. 60

But it is home to tribes of all kinds of people,  
The black-skinned Ethiopians. One man

is the ruler, tyrant, and lone general of the land.

He rules this state and judges mortals. He is a priest as well  
and he is also my father and theirs. 65

Chum: Sepphora, you must recount this.

Sepphora: Father gave me to this stranger in marriage.

Moses: I had a vision of a throne at the top of Sinai.

It was so large that it reached the folds of heaven,  
a man of noble birth sat upon it 70  
having a crown on his head and holding a large scepter  
in his left hand. With his right he motioned for me,  
and I stood before the throne.  
He gave me the scepter and he told me  
to sit on the great throne. He gave me the royal crown 75

and then got off the throne,  
and I looked upon the entire earth  
and below the earth and above the sky.  
A great number of stars fell at my feet,  
and I counted all of them. 80  
They went by me like a company of troops.  
When I woke up from the dream, I was afraid.

Raguel: O stranger, God has given a good sign.  
Would that I might live to see these things happen.  
Then you will raise up a great throne 85  
You will be a judge and lead men.  
As for your vision of the entire inhabited earth,  
and the things under it and those above the heaven of God:  
You will behold the present, the past and the future.

Moses: Oh my! What is this omen from the bush, 90  
such an incredible and difficult thing for men to believe?

A bush that is suddenly ablaze with roaring flame,  
yet its entire shoot remains green,  
what is happening here? I will get closer and behold this great spectacle.  
For it is difficult for me to believe such things. 95

God: Stop, Moses, you noble man, do not come closer,  
until you have removed the shoes from your feet.  
For the ground under your feet is holy,  
and the word of God shines forth from the bush.  
Fear not, my child, and listen to my words. 100  
For since you are mortal it is impossible to see my face  
But you must listen to my words:  
This is why I have come.  
I am the God of your ancestors, as you call them,  
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 105  
Having remembered them and my gifts,  
I am here to save my people- the Hebrews.  
I have seen the suffering and distress of my servants.  
But come and make known my words  
First to all the Hebrews, 110  
Then to the king make known the things prescribed to you,  
So that you might lead my people out of this land.

Moses: I do not have the natural ability to speak,  
I have difficulty speaking and a weak voice,  
And so I cannot speak before the king. 115

God: I will quickly send Aaron your brother,  
You will tell him everything that I have told you,

He will thus speak before the king.  
You will speak with me, but he with you.

God: What do you have in your hands? Tell me at once. 120

Moses: A staff for chastising beasts and men.

God: Throw it on the ground and get away quickly.  
For it will become a terrifying serpent and you will be in awe of it.

Moses: Behold, I have thrown it down. Oh Master, be gracious to me.

How fearful, how awe-inspiring. Have pity on me. 125

Looking upon this, I shudder, and the limbs of my body tremble.

God: Fear not. Reach your hand out and grab the tail of the serpent,  
and the staff will again become as it was.  
Now put your hand into your cloak and take it out.

Moses: I have done it. It has become as snow. 130

God: Put your hand into your cloak again, and it will become as it was.

God: With this rod you will bring about all manner of ill things.  
First, the river will flow with blood,  
all streams and pools of water.  
I will cast a multitude of frogs and gnats upon the land. 135

Then I will sprinkle ash from furnaces on them,

And painful sores will rise up on mortal men,  
flies will also come and afflict many of the Egyptians.  
After these things, again another plague will come,

and those who have hard hearts will die. 140

Then I will provoke the heavens. Now hail with fire  
will fall and put mortals in their graves.

And vegetation and animals will be destroyed.

I will cause darkness to fall for three entire days

and I will send locusts, and all the remaining 145

men and foliage of crops will perish.

After all of these things happen, I will kill

first born children of men. I will cause the arrogance of wicked men to cease.

But King Pharaoh will not be moved by these things just mentioned,

Except when his first born child dies. 150

And then being afraid you will promptly send the people out.

Say this to all the Hebrew people:

This month will be the first of your years.

In this month I will lead away the people into another land,

land which I promised to the patriarchs of the Hebrew race. 155

You will say to all the people, "Sacrifice the paschal lamb  
to God on the day of the full moon of the first month.

Just before night touch the door with blood,

so that the fearful angel will pass over when he sees this sign.

And at night you will eat the roasted meat.

160

Then in haste the king will cast out all the people.

When you are about to depart, I will bestow favor

to the people, one woman from another will receive

vessels and fine clothes, whatever a person could carry,

gold, silver and robes, in order to repay the Egyptians

165

for what they did against the Hebrews.

When you come into your own land,

because from the dawn when you left and sojourned

from Egypt, it was seven days. For seven days

you will eat unleavened bread,

170

and you will worship God, sacrificing to God

the firstborn males,

whatever offspring virgins first bear

and males which lay open wombs of mothers.

On the tenth of this month, command the Hebrew men

175



to take unblemished sheep and calves for their families,

And you will preserve them until

The sun shines on the fourteenth day.

And at evening, after making the sacrifice you will eat all of it roasted, including the inward parts.

This is how you will eat these things: with a robe on, 180

With shoes on your feet and

With a staff in your hands.

For in haste the king will order all to leave the land.

And all will be called. And after you have offered the sacrifice,

take a handful of hyssop in your hand, 185

dip it into blood and touch two doorposts,

so that death might pass by the Hebrews.

You will keep this feast for the Lord,

Seven days of unleavened bread. And no leaven

will be eaten. For you will be delivered from these evils, 190

and in this month God will grant your exodus.

This month is the beginning of months and eras.

Egyp. Mess: For when King Pharaoh left his house with this

multitude of a myriad armed men,

with all his cavalry and four-horsed chariots 195

and the front ranks and others alongside.

There was a vast array of men drawn up in battle order.

The infantry was in the middle and battalions,  
but there was room for the chariots to pass through.

And cavalrymen were posted on the left, 200

with all others of the Egyptian army on the right.

I asked about how many fighting men there were.

“One million” was the response.

And when my army met the Hebrews in battle,  
they were gathered about having been thrown 205

along the coast of the Red Sea.

Some men were giving food to their infant children  
together with their wives, overcome with fatigue,  
with many flocks and household goods strewn about.

They were all unarmed and when they saw us, 210

with tears flowing down their cheeks, they cried aloud  
toward the heavens and toward their ancestral God,  
and there was much consternation among them.

But for our part we felt immense joy.

Then we set up camp opposite them, 215

(Some men call this place “Beelzephon”).

And when the Titan Sun was about to set,  
we waited, wishing for a morning battle,  
being persuaded by our vast army and awesome weapons.

But it was then that the divine portents began- 220

They were amazing to witness. And a large pillar  
that looked like a cloud was placed on the ground (large it was),

Between our camp and the midst of the Hebrews,  
and then their leader Moses, taking the staff of God,  
with which he had beforehand brought forth 225

evil signs and portents against Egypt,  
he struck the surface of the Red Sea and divided  
its depths. And they all rushed forward  
mightily through the salty path.

But we quickly went through it ourselves 230  
along their track. We ran forth shouting,

but found night. And suddenly the wheels of our  
chariots would not turn, as if they were bound tightly.

And light from heaven like a great fire  
shone forth to us. As far as we could tell, God 235

was their helper. And when they were  
across the sea, a large wave gushed forth  
right beside us. There was one man there who when he saw this  
said, "Run away back to our homes away from the hands of the Most High!

For he is a helper to them, but bringing us wretches 240  
to our ruin." And the path of the Red Sea was washed away  
And the army was utterly destroyed.

Watchman: Most excellent Moses, take note of what  
Place we have found. It is by that airy vale.  
For it is over there, I suppose, and you can see. 245  
From there a light shined forth  
at night. It was a sign, like a fiery pillar.  
There we found a shady meadow  
And streams of water. A land of abundance and depth,  
twelve springs are drawn from one rock, 250  
and many trunks of strong palm trees are there  
fruitful and seventy in number and surrounded by water.  
  
The young shoots are forage for our animals.  
  
We also saw another living creature, a strange and  
wonderful thing, such as no one has ever seen. 255  
For it was more or less twice the size of an eagle.  
Its feathers were multi-colored.  
its breast appeared to be purple,  
and its legs red. And around its neck  
saffron dyed tresses hang. 260  
His head was like that of a cock.  
He was looking around with his yellow eyes.  
And his pupils almost looked like pomegranate seeds.  
His voice was the most extraordinary of all.  
It seemed as if he was the king of all birds. 265

For all the birds together  
being fearful of him, followed after him,  
and he was in front, as a prideful bull,  
and lifting up his foot, he walked with a quick step.

