

Names of Redemption: The Interpretation of Exo 1 in the Midrash Tanhuma

According to the book of Exodus (Exo 1), the “sons of Israel” multiply excessively in Egypt and therefore get more and more oppressed by Pharaoh who tries to stop their increase by forced labour and killing of the new-born. The roles in this story are clear: Pharaoh is the wicked enemy whereas the Israelites are the oppressed and powerless. The interpretation of Exo 1 in the Midrash Tanhuma (Standard edition and Buber version) presents the situation in a subtly nuanced manner: Israel is subtly criticized and Pharaoh is put in a slightly better light. Most importantly, God and the coming redemption play a significant part in the interpretation.