

# MOSES: SLAVE TO PRINCE TO SHEPHERD

Exodus 1 - 4

## STRUCTURE

**Key-person:** Moses

**Key-locations:** Egypt, Midian, Mount Horeb

**Key-repetitions:**

- The Israelites kept on reproducing and constantly grew in number (1:7, 9, 10, 12, 20).
- The Israelites suffered in Egypt (1:7, 11-12, 13-14, 15-18, 22; 2:11, 23-24; 3:7-9).
- The Lord was aware of the Israelites' suffering (2:22; 3:7-9, 16-17).
- The Lord is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:6, 15, 16; 4:5).
- Moses objected to returning to Egypt and God answered his objections (3:11-12, 13-18; 4:1-9, 10-12, 13-17).

**Key-attitudes:**

- Pharaoh's fear of the Israelites.
- Agony and suffering of the Israelites.
- Self-confidence felt by Prince Moses.
- The Israelites' rejection of Prince Moses when he attempted to help them.
- Moses' insecurity when the Lord commanded him to return to Egypt.

- God's anger at Moses when he kept refusing to return to Egypt.

**Initial-situation:**

God promised to give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan. Abraham's great-grandson, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his half-brothers and taken to Egypt. God enabled Joseph to become governor of Egypt. During a time of drought, Joseph's brothers went to Egypt seeking food. Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, invited them to move to Egypt and provided for their needs.

The drought ended. However, Joseph, his brothers, and their families continued living in Egypt. Before dying, Joseph requested that his brothers carry his bones with them when they returned to the land promised to Abraham.

**Initial-problem:**

A king came to power in Egypt who did not know about Joseph; he feared the Israelites and planned to destroy them.

**Final-situation:**

Moses and Aaron met with the leaders of Israel. The leaders believed that the Lord had seen their misery and they bowed down and worshiped (4:29-31).

## BIBLE STORY

### Oppressions in Egypt

Israel with seventy of his descendants went to Egypt. Joseph was already in Egypt (1:1-5).

The generation that included Joseph and his brothers all died. The descendants of Israel kept growing in number. The land was filled with them. About 350 years after Israel and his descendants entered Egypt, a Pharaoh (king) who did not know about Joseph came to power. He warned his people, "There are too many Israelites. We must deal with them or they will keep growing in number. If war breaks out, they will join our enemies and leave the country." He elaborated plans to destroy the Israelites (Ex 1:6-10).

The Egyptians put slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. The harder the Egyptians worked the Israelites, the more children they had (1:11-14).

Pharaoh told the two Hebrew midwives, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth, observe the sex of the baby. If it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives feared God and disobeyed Pharaoh's orders (1:15-21).

Then Pharaoh issued an order, "Every Hebrew boy that is born must be thrown into the Nile River, but let every girl live" (1:22).

### **Moses in Egypt**

A Hebrew couple from the tribe of Levi had a baby boy. The mother hid him for three months. Then she took a basket, waterproofed it with tar and pitch, and placed the baby inside. She set it afloat in the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. Miriam, the baby's sister, watched from a distance.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile River to bathe. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it, saw the crying baby and felt sorry for him. She said, "This is one of the Hebrew babies."

Miriam, the baby's sister, asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Do you want me to get a nursing Hebrew mother to nurse the baby for you?"

Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes, go."

The girl fetched the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter told her, "I will pay you to take this baby and nurse him for me." After the child was weaned, the mother took him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses which means "Pulled-Out", saying, "I pulled him out of the water" (2:1-10).

### **Moses Commits Murder and Flees to Midian**

When Moses was a forty-year-old man (Heb 11:23), he went to watch his own people at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating one of his relatives. Moses killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand (Ex 2:11-14).

### **Moses Flees to Midian**

Pharaoh heard about it and tried to kill Moses, but Moses fled to the land of Midian. Moses went to live with Jethro the priest. He married Jethro's daughter, Zipporah (2:16-22).

Years after Moses went to Midian, Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery and cried out. God heard their cries and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (2:23-25).

### **God Speaks to Moses from a Burning Bush**

Moses shepherded his father-in-law's flock for 40 years. On one occasion, he led the flock to the far side of the desert to Horeb, the Mountain of God. God's angel appeared to Moses in flames of fire blazing from within a bush. Moses saw the burning bush that was not consumed by fire. Moses went to investigate why the bush didn't burn up (3:1-3).

The Lord called out from within the bush, "Moses! Moses! Remove your sandals. You are standing on holy ground! I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out for deliverance from their slave masters. I have come down to rescue them from the grip of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a land flowing with milk and honey. I am sending you back to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (3:1-10).

Moses objected. He gave God reasons why he could not bring the Israelites out of Egypt. God answered his every objection (3:13 - 4:31).

• 1<sup>st</sup>: Moses objected, "Who am I, that I should go? God answered, "I will be with you" (3:11-12).

- 2<sup>nd</sup>: Moses objected, “Suppose they ask me, ‘What is his name?’” God answered, “I AM WHO I AM” (3:12-22).
- 3<sup>rd</sup>: Moses objected, “What if they don’t believe me or listen to me?” The Lord gave Moses three miraculous signs.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> sign: A staff changed to a snake and then back into a staff (4:1-5).
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> sign: Moses’ hand turned into leprous and then healed (4:6-7).
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> sign: Moses poured out water, and it turned into blood (4:8-8).
- 4<sup>th</sup>: Moses objected, “Lord, I don’t speak eloquently. I stutter and stammer.” The Lord answered, “Who gave man his mouth?” (4:10-12).
- 5<sup>th</sup>: Moses objected, “Lord, send someone else to do it.” The Lord became angry with Moses and told him, “Your brother Aaron is good with words. You shall tell Aaron what to say. He will speak to the people for you. He will be as your mouth and you will decide what comes out of it. Now take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it!” (4:13-17).

### **Moses Returns to Egypt**

Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. Also, he took the staff of God in his hand (4:19-23).

The Lord sent Aaron into the desert to meet Moses, his brother. Moses told Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to speak, and about the miraculous signs God had commanded him to do (4:24-28).

Moses and Aaron met with the leaders of Israel. Aaron told them everything the Lord had told Moses. The leaders believed that the Lord had seen their misery. They bowed down and worshiped God (4:29-31).

## GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

## SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Pharaoh deal with the increased population of the Israelites?
2. How did Moses, the slave baby, become adopted into Pharaoh’s family?
3. What happened when Moses first attempted to help the Israelite slaves?
4. Describe the occasion when God spoke to Moses about returning to Egypt?
5. Have you resisted following God’s plans for your life?

## LIFE-LESSONS

1. There are crisis situations when God’s presence and intervention is the only thing that prevents his people from being totally destroyed. The Israelites were similar to the burning bush that was in danger of being totally destroyed. Just as the presence of God within the burning bush

prevented its being consumed, his presence with Israel prevented Pharaoh from destroying them (Ex 3:1-3).

2. God coordinates events in order to protect and to guide his servants. Divine providence was evident when God coordinated circumstances to protect Moses' life and to place him in the king's palace. There he received an education that would prepare him to be a leader who could lead the Israelites to the promised land (Ex 2:1-10).
3. People understand who God is by both his salvation actions and his spoken revelation. God would reveal himself to Israel by his acts of redeeming them from slavery. He also revealed himself by his spoken word to Moses and to others through Bible history. For the rest of Bible history, God is known as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Ex 20:2).
4. God is eternal. He has always existed, and he will always exist. God told Moses to inform the Israelites that "I Am" had given him orders. That means that he never had a beginning, will never have an ending and he is independent of all people and of all things (Ex 3:14).
5. Any place where a person is aware that God is present and communicating becomes "Holy Ground." Horeb, also called Sinai, was the place where God revealed himself to Moses (3:2) and where, later on, he gave the Law to his people (3:12; chapters 19-20). The things God said and did on the mountain were what made it "Holy Ground." Wherever one studies the Bible or becomes aware that God is speaking, it is "Holy Ground."
6. When God chooses a person for a task, his presence enables the chosen one to do the job. God told Moses he was sending him to Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses objected, "Why me? Who am I, that I should go ...?" God answered that he would be with Moses (Ex 3:10-12).