

## Moses (Part 1)

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, shows us several people who also appear in the Qur'an, the holy book of the Muslims. We have already examined the stories of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Lot, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Through Joseph, God delivered Jacob and all his family from the seven years of famine that struck the world during that time. Considering the service that Joseph had rendered to Pharaoh and all the Egyptian people, his family was enthusiastically welcomed in Egypt.

The second book of the Bible, Exodus, takes up this story some generations later and explains how the situation of the descendants of Jacob (sometimes called Israelites and sometimes called Hebrews) had changed. The central person in this part of the biblical story is a man who, once again, appears often in the pages of the Qur'an. This man is Moses, whom the Muslims call Musa. These are the conditions that prevailed at that time:

“But the Israelites were fruitful, increased rapidly, multiplied, and became extremely numerous so that the land was filled with them. A new king, who had not known Joseph, came to power in Egypt. He said to his people, ‘Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and powerful than we are. Let us deal shrewdly with them; otherwise they will multiply further, and if war breaks out, they may join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.’ So the Egyptians assigned taskmasters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor... But the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and spread so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. They worked the Israelites ruthlessly.” (Exodus 1:7-13)

Then Pharaoh, king of Egypt, gave the order to all his people to throw into the Nile River every newborn Hebrew boy and only leave alive the girls.

### FIRST FORTY YEARS OF MOSES' LIFE

At this time the wife of an Israelite named Amram gave birth to a baby boy that she managed to hide for three months.

“But when she could no longer hide him, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with asphalt and pitch. She placed the child in it and set

it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. Then his sister stood at a distance in order to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe at the Nile while her servant girls walked along the riverbank. Seeing the basket among the reeds, she sent her slave girl to get it. When she opened it, she saw the child—a little boy, crying. She felt sorry for him and said, ‘This is one of the Hebrew boys.’

Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, ‘Should I go and call a woman from the Hebrews to nurse the boy for you?’

‘Go,’ Pharaoh's daughter told her. So the girl went and called the boy's mother. Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your wages.” So the woman took the boy and nursed him. When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, ‘Because,’ she said, ‘I drew him out of the water.’” (Exodus 2:3-10)

This is how Moses, knowing his Israelite origins, grew up in the court of the Egyptian king. He benefited from a life of privilege and a superior education in one of the greatest civilizations of the time. The Bible says in Acts 7:22, “So Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in his speech and actions.”

### SECOND FORTY YEARS OF MOSES' LIFE

Moses was forty years old when his life went through a radical change. We resume our reading in Exodus 2:

“Years later, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his own people and observed their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. Looking all around and seeing no one, he struck the Egyptian dead and hid him in the sand. The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, ‘Why are you attacking your neighbor?’ ‘Who made you a leader and judge over us?’ the man replied. ‘Are you planning to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses became afraid and thought: What I did is certainly known. When Pharaoh heard about this, he tried to kill

Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian.” (Exodus 2:11-15)

Moses settled down there and made a new life for himself. He married a young woman named Zipporah with whom he had two children. For forty years, he led the simple life of a shepherd, far from the center of power and luxury where he had grown up.

### **MOSES RECEIVES A MISSION FROM THE LORD**

It is when Moses reached the age of 80 that everything changed for the second time in his life. God had now prepared him for a very important task. The story continues in Exodus 3:

“Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. Then the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire within a bush. As Moses looked, he saw that the bush was on fire but was not consumed. So Moses thought: I must go over and look at this remarkable sight... When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush.” (Exodus 3:1-4)

He told him that He had seen how His people were being mistreated in Egypt. He had heard the cries of the Israelites under the blows of their oppressors, and He knew their suffering. So He had come to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them to a beautiful and vast country He had promised to their ancestors. He concluded by telling Moses, “Therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10).

Forty years earlier, Moses had believed that he could be a liberator of his people (Acts 7:25). But when God called him, Moses began making excuses. He said, “I can’t.” But God said that He would be with him. Moses was sure that the Israelites would not believe that God had sent him, but God gave him the ability to do miraculous signs to convince them. Moses said that he was not an orator and would have too much trouble expressing himself. God reminded him that He Himself had created the mouth of man and He could make Moses capable of saying what was necessary. But Moses answered:

“Please, Lord, send someone else. Then the Lord became angry with Moses and told him, “Isn’t

Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, he is on his way now to meet you... He will speak to the people for you. He will be your spokesman...” (Exodus 4:13-16).

Moses and Aaron returned to Egypt and went to find Pharaoh to speak to him on God’s behalf to tell him to let the Israelites go. The king of Egypt answered, “Who is Yahweh that I should obey Him by letting Israel go? I do not know anything about Yahweh, and besides, I will not let Israel go” (Exodus 5:2). He also accused Moses and Aaron of causing the Israelites to neglect their work. He ordered the overseers to increase their workload so they would be too busy to think about God.

### **THE TEN PLAGUES**

And so the Lord let loose a series of ten plagues to strike Egypt and its king. God told Moses to order Aaron to hold out his rod over the river. When he did, all the fresh water in Egypt was transformed into blood. But the magicians of the royal court of Egypt managed to create the same miracle and Pharaoh hardened his heart to not listen to Moses. Then Moses told Aaron to stretch out his arm and point his rod toward the rivers, canals and ponds. The frogs came out of them and covered the country. But then the magicians did the same. Nevertheless Pharaoh was forced to ask Moses to remove the frogs, after which he would let the Israelites go. But when the Lord made the frogs die and Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he persisted in refusing to let the people go.

The Lord then told Moses to command Aaron to stretch forth his rod and strike the dust of the ground and transform it into lice. (Some translate the Hebrew word as “gnat”.) This time the magicians were not able to produce the same effect and they told Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” However Pharaoh obstinately refused to give in to God’s demand.

So the succession of plagues continued. God sent upon the Egyptians biting flies (4); a severe, deadly epidemic on their livestock (5); festering boils on the king, the people and their animals (6); the worst thunderstorm ever seen in Egypt with hail that destroyed harvests, broke trees and struck people and animals that had not taken shelter (7); a terrible invasion of grasshoppers that covered the ground to the point that it could not be seen, devouring everything left by the hail until there was no greenery left in the country (8). After that, darkness covered

Egypt for three days; darkness so deep it could be touched and no one dared to leave his home (9). Despite all these misfortunes sent by God over a period of several months, the king would not submit to the will of God.

### THE PASSOVER

The Lord then spoke to Moses, giving specific instructions for the Israelites before He sent the last plague on the Egyptians:

“Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they must each select an animal of the flock according to their fathers’ households, one animal per household... You must have an unblemished animal, a year-old male; you may take it from either the sheep or the goats. You are to keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembly of the community of Israel will slaughter the animals at twilight. They must take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses where they eat them. They are to eat the meat that night; they should eat it, roasted over the fire along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or cooked in boiling water, but only roasted over fire—its head as well as its legs and inner organs. Do not let any of it remain until morning; you must burn up any part of it that does remain before morning. Here is how you must eat it: you must be dressed for travel, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You are to eat it in a hurry; it is the Lord’s Passover.

“I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both man and beast... The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

“This day is to be a memorial for you, and you must celebrate it as a festival to the Lord. You are to celebrate it throughout your generations as a permanent statute.” (Exodus 12:3-14)

This annual feast is called the Passover. It is a day when Jews remember the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery.

The Israelites obeyed the instructions, and God did

as He had promised. He put to death all the first-born in Egypt—the eldest son of Pharaoh as well as the eldest son of the captive in prison and the first-born of the livestock. In the middle of the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and told them to leave his country quickly. He had finally had enough and gave in to God’s demand. This is how God, through his servant Moses, gave the Israelites a great deliverance.

This miracle has a lot of meaning to Christians, who see their past lives in sin as a kind of slavery. The blood of the lambs sacrificed by the Israelites, thanks to which God spared them when He struck the first-born, reminds them of the blood of Jesus Christ, who, in John 1:29, is called “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Moses, the great liberator of the Israelites, reminds us of Jesus, the great liberator of all people.

### CONCLUSION

But God had not finished using Moses. For forty years, this great man will be at the head of the Israelites, leading them and talking to them on God’s behalf. We will see more of the story of Moses in our next lesson.