

The Exodus: Setting the Stage

Read Exodus 1 – 2

The sons of Jacob had sold their brother, Joseph, into slavery in Egypt. But in time, God raised him to the post of prime minister and brought Jacob's entire family to Egypt as honored guests. They were allowed to settle in the land of Goshen, fertile land lying between Joseph's residence and the way to Canaan.

Joseph had saved Egypt and that entire part of the world from starvation, so initially his family was welcomed and treated well. But as the centuries rolled by, that relationship began to change.

That's where the book of Exodus opens. The children of Israel (Israel was Jacob's new name; see Genesis 32:28) had grown from 70 people to hundreds of thousands. In time, Egypt's gratitude changed to fear of this growing group of foreigners among them. So Egypt enslaved the Israelites, as God had foretold to Abraham many years before (Genesis 15:13).

But God continued to bless and prosper Israel. Even the Egyptians' brutal attempts to thwart the population growth of the Israelites proved ineffective, at least initially. So in response, Pharaoh commanded that every male Israelite newborn was to be thrown into the Nile.

When Moses was born, his parents hid him for three months, then complied with the order to cast him into the Nile. But they did so in a wicker basket, with his sister to watch over him. As the familiar story goes, Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal palace as the grandson of Pharaoh.

Though raised as Egyptian royalty, Moses clearly identified with his own people. When a conflict arose between an Israelite slave and an Egyptian guard, Moses killed the guard. As a result, he was forced to flee far to the east, to the land of Midian – beyond the Sinai Peninsula, south of Canaan. There he married, had a family, and served his father-in-law for forty years as a shepherd.

But through all these events and all these years, God was preparing Moses for a role that he had no idea was coming.

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