



Moses' Birth

Plan with notes



Aims – select the most relevant for your group

- Every action has consequences. Our role may seem small, but it is still important.
- God can use bad things for good. He can turn the most difficult of circumstances into something that benefits people. He has reasons for allowing problems even if we cannot see them at the time. This does not mean he creates the problem, mankind does that themselves. He works around the freewill that he gifted us.
- Oppression and racism

Bible references

Exodus 1 - 2:10

Key Bible verse Hebrews 11:23 or Romans 8:28

- a) Hebrews 11²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.
- b) Romans 8: 28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Attention grabbers

- Have there been any new babies in your family recently? How did you feel about that? What preparations did your family make?
- Game: Consequences. Pass round pieces of paper. Write down a line from a simple story, fold over the paper and pass to the next person for the next line. Write as follows: Boy's name, met; girl's name; Place they met; He said...; She said...; He (what he did); She (what she did); The consequence was... (<http://www.papq.com/show?1TXW> for details)
- Oppressed people groups – find a story
- Slavery – find a report

Set the scene

Have Bibles open at Exodus 1. They may know the story even if only from 'Moses Prince of Egypt which tells its own version. Read out Hebrews 11:23 and ask questions about it. Why did they have to hide the baby? What was the king's edict?

Activities select:

a) Drama

Using Bibles, let them create a short drama of the story. Large groups could be split, small groups can double up; 6-12ish per group.

Main characters:

Pharaoh, attendants/soldiers, 2 midwives, Moses mother (and father?), Miriam, (Aaron optional as only 3 years old), princess, attendants

Props: doll and basket/box/container, throne, something to represent the river

Scenes: the palace; Moses home, the river bank

- How do you think each of these people felt? Why did they do what they did?

b) Discussion

Discuss the main characters, perhaps allocating each to a small group: Pharaoh, the midwives, Moses' mother, Miriam, Pharaoh's daughter.

- What did each of these do and why?
- What was Pharaoh afraid of?
- What risks did the women take?
- How difficult would young Miriam have found her task?
- What can we see of their characters?
- What were the consequences of their actions?

For the whole story:

- Can you identify with any of the characters?
- What can you learn through this story?

Overall consequences

If you are short of time here, you could cover this in the next story of Moses fleeing to Midian.

- What did the oppression change?
The Hebrews went from having a comfortable life in Egypt to a harsh, oppressive one. They began to think of returning to the Promised Land of their forefathers
- What good came out of the circumstances of Moses' birth?
He was given an upbringing that equipped him for his future calling, with the best possible education of that era.
- Why did Moses need such a good education?
He would later need to know how to address Pharaoh
He would later lead the Israelites
He compiled the first five books of the Bible with help from God.

Application questions select:

- Consider the consequences of some of the things that you do – or don't do. Our role may seem small, but it is still important that we play our part.
See the poem 'For Want of a Nail'.
<https://nationalpoetryday.co.uk/poem/for-want-of-a-nail/>
Some people like to start each day by asking God to help them made good choices that day.
- What is so precious to you that you would find it hard to trust someone else with it?
- Do we have a different attitude towards people of other races or groups to our own? Do we feel superior in any way? Why? How can we change those attitudes if needed?
- Can you think of any oppressed group that you could do something to help, even in a small way?

Leader's notes *More details available in the background article*

Exodus 1:8-22. ⁸ Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. ⁹ He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. ¹⁰ We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more. If we don't, and if war breaks out, they will join our enemies and fight against us. Then they will escape from the country." ¹¹ So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labour. They forced them to build the cities of Pithom and Rameses as supply centres for the king. ¹² But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread, and the more alarmed the Egyptians became. ¹³ So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. ¹⁴ They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands. ¹⁵ Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: ¹⁶ "When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. ^[b] If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." ¹⁷ But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king's orders. They allowed the boys to live, too. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. "Why have you done this?" he demanded. "Why have you allowed the boys to live?" ¹⁹ "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women," the midwives replied. "They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time." ²⁰ So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own. ²² Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Throw every new-born Hebrew boy into the Nile River. But you may let the girls live." NLT

1. Pharaoh: Exodus 1:8-16, 22

'A new king rose who did not know Joseph'.

It's a fair assumption that the Israelites continued to be treated well for some years after Joseph's death because he had done much to strengthen the power of the Middle Kingdom pharaohs. However nothing lasts forever; the dynasty grew weak and lost power in the north to a group of Semitic people called the Hyksos. Eventually an Egyptian noble from Thebes named Ahmose regained power and drove out the Hyksos but not the Israelites. We don't know which ruler first enslaved the Israelites, whether it was the Hyksos or Ahmose, but it continued for many decades. Slaves had been used by Egyptians for centuries but during the New Kingdom it became particularly ruthless, especially with the infanticide of the Hebrew boys.

Bullies and oppressors are often motivated by fear. They also want to be in control. The economy of Egypt benefitted from their use as slaves.

- What was Pharaoh so afraid of, and why did he not want them to leave?

2. The midwives: Exodus 1:15-21

Midwifery is one of the oldest professions with experienced women training the younger ones. Their work included emotional support, encouragement, medical care, and religious help. Egyptians called upon the help of a number of their gods through prayers, special ritual practices, magical objects, and spells.

Were these midwives Hebrew or Egyptian? We can't be sure. Shifra and Puah are Semitic names but would Pharaoh really have expected Hebrew woman to kill their own kind?

Jewish historian Josephus said they were Egyptian which if so, would make it all the more remarkable that they defied Pharaoh's order to kill all Hebrew baby boys. When he challenged them over this:

'¹⁹ "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women," the midwives replied. "They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time." Exodus 1:19

Pharaoh in his ignorance and respectful of their expertise, believed them! They risked their own lives to save the lives of many babies and God rewarded them for this by giving them families of their own.

- Like the medical staff in the time of the coronavirus and other plagues, these midwives risked their lives to save others. Can you think of other people who have done/do this?

Exodus 2:1-10. Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a **Levite woman**, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket¹ for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ **His sister** stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then **Pharaoh's daughter** went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. 'This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?'

⁸ 'Yes, go,' she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water.' NIV

3. Moses' mother: Exodus 2:1-10

Moses mother may have still been quite young, perhaps in her 20's, even though she already had two children. She had to trust God enough to let go of her precious baby without knowing if he would live or die. Not only that, but had they been caught, the whole family could have been in danger.

She planned it carefully. They lived in the Nile delta not far from the city of Ramses where pharaoh had a palace. She knew the local riverbank, that it was safe for bathing and was used by some of the royal family. It was a calculated risk. She took a small basket made from papyrus reeds which were also used to make boats at that time. She waterproofed it with tar and placed it carefully in a safe area midst the reeds near where she knew the royals might visit. She had to rely entirely on the reaction of the princess. At 3 months Moses was a lovely baby full of smiles and taking an interest in everything around him. Would he appeal to the royal lady who would of course need a wet nurse if she were to take him into her household?

- What hopes and fears might she have had for her baby son?
- What is so precious to you that you would find it hard to trust someone else with it?

¹ Uses the same word as 'ark' in Noah's story.

4. **Miriam:** Exodus 2:4-9

I wonder how old was Miriam? Her younger brother Aaron was 3 and she may not have been much older. We are not told.

- How would she have felt? This was a nerve-racking task for one so young.
- Had her mum coached her in what to say to her if she had the opportunity?
- How much courage do you think it took for Miriam to speak to the princess?

Her native language was Hebrew; I wonder how much Egyptian she could speak?

- What do you think helped her to take this brave step?

Her love for her baby brother was strong and that helped her to find the courage, plus her family were praying for her.

If the princess took a liking to the baby, it was obvious that she would need a wet nurse to feed the child. This was not unusual for royal and wealthy families anyway. There was no formula milk in those days and animal milk is not really suitable. In some cases, as with Moses, the child lived with the wet nurse until they were weaned when they were about 3 years old.

5. **Pharaoh's daughter:** Exodus 2:1-10

There were few people who could have safely rescued a Hebrew baby and provided for him in the way that Pharaoh's daughter did. Her role was crucial and yet we know nothing about her² except that she had royal status and even that is obscure. Pharaoh had many daughters as the pharaohs of the New Kingdom maintained residences and harem in a number of cities. All royal children enjoyed status and respect.

We know for certain that God timed her arrival at the river exactly right so that this baby would be saved in good time. There is no hint that she feared Pharaoh's anger for ignoring the edict. After all it was just one baby!

- What sort of person do you think she was?

Moses' education

"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action." Acts 7:22 NIV

Moses needed to have a good education for the roles to which God would call him. As an adopted prince, Moses was given the best education available anywhere in the world at that time. All boys from wealthy families attended school from the age of 7 and were taught a wide range of subjects. There was a 'Princes School', but royals also had private tutors such as retired officers or court officials. Princes would learn skills to enable them to help run the country.

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Image: Microsoft clip art

Bible text: New Living Translation and New International Version

Source material listed in the background article.

² Although there is a Jewish tradition that she converted to Judaism – see background article.