

THE BIRTH OF MOSES

Exodus 1; 2:1-10

The book of Genesis ends with the death of Joseph. At that time the Israelites were settled comfortably in Egypt and still respected because of Joseph. But as the years passed, and the Hebrews grew in numbers, the Egyptians began to resent them until one of the Pharaohs ordered that all male children born to the Hebrews were to be killed. This is where the story begins in the book of Exodus.

Doctrinal Points

“To be led by the Lord is freedom.” –A. 5660^e

Notes for Parents

It is widely recognized that the land of Canaan represents heaven or a heavenly character, but few realize that all the countries mentioned in the Bible picture specific planes or states of our minds. There are three countries especially which are mentioned over and over again in the Bible: Canaan, Assyria, and Egypt. There are three major planes of mind in each of us: the inmost plane, where we feel the promptings of the Lord, the plane of our rational thinking, and the plane of our natural knowledge and thought. In the Bible, Canaan pictures the inmost plane, Assyria pictures the rational plane, and Egypt the outmost or natural plane. It is in this outmost plane that all our sense impressions are registered, the things we see and hear, what we read, and what we learn from other people. All these things are stored up in our memories, as Joseph stored up grain in Egypt, against the time of famine—the time when we become conscious of our need of knowledge for use in life. Again and again in the Bible story people go down into Egypt, and this always pictures a learning period.

But learning is not particularly valuable in and of itself. It is

meant for use. Jacob and his family came down into Egypt to be nourished in the time of famine, but they should have gone back to the land of Canaan when the famine was over—back to the service of the Lord. Instead, they found themselves comfortable and prosperous in Egypt, and settled down there, forgetting their true home and eventually coming to worship the gods of the Egyptians instead of their own God.

People do the same today. They begin to study in order to master the knowledge necessary for a profession, a trade, or a business, and then often fall in love with the knowledge itself and simply try to keep on learning, not applying their knowledge to the service of the Lord and the neighbor. A man may become so absorbed in building up his business or improving his farm that he has no time or thought for his family and friends, much less for the church. A woman may become so intent on taking care of her house and improving it that she forgets that its only real value is as a home for her family, where they can be happy and safe and from which they can go out eager to perform their uses in the world. Such a man or woman has become a slave in Egypt, as the Hebrews did.

The Lord raised up Moses to lead the people back to the Holy Land. In each one of us He preserves some knowledge of the Word of God, which we have perhaps learned in childhood. He takes care of it and brings it back to our conscious memory when we finally realize into what bondage we have fallen. Under divine providence, Moses was brought up in the court of Pharaoh in all the learning of the Egyptians, but he was nursed in infancy by his true mother, so that he felt himself to be a Hebrew and knew the traditions of his people. No one of us is without his “Moses,” prepared by the Lord and ready to lead him back to the Holy Land when he wants to go.

Primary

The littlest ones can understand most of this simple story. Be sure they know

that it was really the Lord who saved Moses by bringing Pharaoh's daughter to the river just at the right time. Impress upon them the name *Moses*. Show them what a mistake the Israelites made when they stayed in Egypt instead of going back to the land the Lord had given them, when the famine was over. The trouble they got into as a result leads directly to the story of Moses, which is always interesting to children and easy to tell.

During the days of Joseph, Pharaoh gave the Hebrews the best part of Egypt to live in, and they became so prosperous and comfortable there that they did not go back after the famine in Canaan was over, as they should have done. This proved a foolish mistake. For after Joseph died, the kings of Egypt became less friendly to the Hebrews, and finally the Egyptians became so afraid of this growing nation of strangers in their land that they decided to make slaves of them and keep them down in other ways.

What happened about two hundred years after Joseph died?

What order did the new Pharaoh give?

What child was saved?

How was he saved?

Who adopted him?

Who was his nurse?

Let us read the story from the Bible. [Read Exodus 1:6-22; 2:1-10.] We shall hear much more about Moses in our next lessons; so you want to be sure to remember his name. You see the Lord took care of Moses just as He had taken care of Joseph.

Junior

The Juniors are old enough to be interested in the fact that the Hebrew people increased in Egypt until the Pharaoh became afraid of them and tried to prevent them from producing any more fighting men. Stress the Lord's protection of the infant Moses. Also show them how important the double education of Moses—(1) in the learning of the Egyptians, and (2) in the traditions of the Hebrews—would be when it came time for him to deliver his people from the Egyptian bondage.

Joseph at first had had a very hard time in Egypt, but the Lord was with him and helped him to rise until he became a very great

man, ruler of the whole land, subject only to the Pharaoh, as the king of Egypt was called. In time of famine Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food and were very much afraid when they discovered that the ruler they had to deal with was actually the brother they had wronged. But Joseph forgave them and, with Pharaoh's consent, invited his whole family to move down into Egypt for the duration of the famine.

Who before this in the Bible story had come to Egypt because of famine?

Pharaoh gave Jacob and his family the best of the land to live in and they liked it so well that they did not go back, as they should have, after the famine was over. They lived in Egypt a great many years—long enough to multiply into a numerous people. We read in Genesis 46:26-27 that sixty-six men in all came down to Egypt at Joseph's invitation, and in Exodus 12:37-40 we read that when they finally left there were about six hundred thousand men, besides children.

During this long time a great change had taken place in the condition of the Hebrews in Egypt. Our chapter says, "There arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." This was really a whole new line of kings. They did not see the Hebrews as friends, but as possible enemies because they were an alien people—not Egyptians. So the new Pharaohs tried to hold the Hebrews down and made slaves of them. You know that the Egyptians built great temples and tombs, such as the pyramids. They used the Hebrews as laborers in these works. They did not have building machinery such as we have. Men had to do all the heavy lifting and building.

What cruel command did Pharaoh give?

The people naturally tried in every way to save their baby boys, and the Lord helped them. The Lord even made use of Pharaoh's harsh command when He wanted a man trained to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt.

Who was this man?

How did his mother try to save him?

An ark is a container made for the safekeeping of something precious. There are three famous arks in the Bible, of which the ark of Moses is the second.

What was the first?

Do you know what the third ark was?

The ark which held the baby Moses was made of bulrushes. The bulrushes of Egypt were the stalks of the papyrus plant, from which paper also was made. Notice that this little ark, just like Noah's ark, was covered with pitch to keep it afloat. The sister of Moses, who was set to watch and see what happened to him, was probably Miriam, of whom we learn later.

Who came to the river and found Moses?

What did she decide to do?

Whom did his sister bring to nurse him?

So you see that Moses, when he grew up, would have the knowledge of his Hebrew birth and all the Hebrew traditions from his mother, and he would also have the advantage of the best schooling in the world, which at that time was to be had in Egypt, and would also know at first hand a great deal about government. So the Lord prepared him to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt, organize them into a nation, and lead them back to their true home in Canaan.

Intermediate

With this age group it may be well to discuss the fact that we each have a higher and a lower nature which are constantly at variance with each other. At this age children have their serious and thoughtful times, but they are liable to be swept away quickly by claims of exercise and play. They need to understand that their everyday pleasures and activities are good in their place but that they should lead to and not away from the establishment of a genuinely good character. Any activity of which in their better moments they are ashamed is questionable. The commandments are the test, the only laws which can be trusted to lead to a good and happy life here and in heaven. A helpful thought to give them is that if they cannot say "no" to temptation, they are really slaves.

Exodus 12:40 says that the Israelites were in Egypt four hundred and thirty years, and four hundred is the number given in Genesis 15:13 and in Acts 7:6. Scholars have estimated that the actual time was something over two hundred years. Swedenborg says in the *Arcana Coelestia*, n. 1502 that the years “were not reckoned from Jacob’s going down into Egypt, but from the sojourning of Abram in Egypt, counting from which the years were four hundred and thirty.” However, in the Word numbers are important for their correspondence rather than for their historical accuracy.

The Pharaoh who set Joseph over the land had urged him to bring his father and his brothers and their flocks down to Egypt and had given them the best of the land to live in, the fertile delta of the Nile. But after Joseph’s death, as the Hebrews increased in numbers (during the time they were in Egypt their numbers increased from seventy persons to more than six hundred thousand), the Pharaohs began to be afraid of these strangers in their midst, and in the time of our lesson for today the Pharaoh took drastic steps to limit their increase, especially the increase of fighting men.

The history of the Israelites in the Word was so recorded by inspiration from the Lord that it might throughout represent the history of the church in man, a man’s relation to the Lord. The Israelites came down to Egypt in time of famine to be nourished and cared for by Joseph. The Pharaoh who made Joseph ruler of his land is a picture of our external memory when it is orderly and used in the service of the Lord.* So the coming down of the Hebrews to Egypt at that time pictures an orderly state of acquiring knowledge under the protection of a true spiritual affection. But Joseph died and was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt. Sometimes we become absorbed in the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and forget its spiritual purpose. We come under the domination of a principle which recognizes only worldly aims. This is the Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph.” Then, although we

*although it may not be so used by us *consciously* or *deliberately*. –Ed.

may seem to ourselves to be leading an independent life, doing as we please, we are really servants under a hard master, working very hard to build up wealth and power, and driven by ambition and greed. People often work themselves to death to acquire things which at death they have to leave behind them. Swedenborg says, “To be led by the Lord is freedom.”

In the Word the birth of sons pictures the development of new truth. Pharaoh’s ordering all the male children killed at birth pictures the fact that worldly ambition in the end seeks to destroy every spiritual thought which may come to us. But Moses was saved. Moses, because he was to lead the people out of Egyptian bondage and be the Lord’s instrument in the giving of the commandments, pictures divine law. Most of us in our childhood become at least somewhat familiar with the ten commandments. Those who are not taught them directly from the Bible get many of them indirectly, because they are implied in all the laws which we have to observe in order to keep out of trouble even in a worldly sense. This knowledge of the commandments is what leads us out of our Egyptian bondage. Moses had an Israelitish mother and an Egyptian foster mother. That is, the divine law really comes from the Lord, but even our affection for getting along in the world makes us see that it is desirable and to be preserved. This is pictured, too, by the fact that the ark of bulrushes was daubed with slime and pitch to keep it afloat. The ark which Noah built was daubed with pitch also. Pitch represents selfishness. We are often saved from doing something wrong by our selfish fear of consequences. The rushes which grow at the river’s edge, which in this case were probably the papyrus plant, represent the simplest ideas of what is right and fitting.

In a more particular sense the ark of bulrushes pictures the letter of the Word, and in this sense Pharaoh’s daughter stands for the natural love of knowing about everything, which sometimes leads people to read the Bible even before they see any higher use in it than to be able to talk about it. But the little infant is nourished and cared for by his own mother. Divine truth is fed and

cherished in us by means of love for the Lord and His truth which is a part of our inheritance from our heavenly Father, the “remains” planted in us in infancy and early childhood.

Moses growing up in the court of Pharaoh pictures the letter of the Word growing up in us as a part of our worldly education, but fostered under the Lord’s providence by a deeper feeling of which we are hardly conscious.

Basic Correspondences

- rushes = the simplest ideas of right
 - pitch = selfishness
 - Moses = the divine law
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Senior

The young people should be impressed by the spiritual meaning of the bondage in Egypt. They know people who are slaves to their appetites, to their business, to their housework, to their intellectual pursuits, and even to their bridge parties. We spoke recently of higher and lower values. This is a good thought to keep constantly before them. In this lesson show them that when our “Joseph” dies in us, we easily become slaves to external considerations.

The word *Genesis* means “beginning.” We can think of the whole book of Genesis as treating of the beginning of our lives. Swedenborg tells us that as infants we are surrounded and protected by celestial angels, angels of the third or highest heaven. So at that time we are in the sphere of the celestial plane of life. As we grow and become conscious of ourselves as individuals and begin to think and reason, the celestial angels recede and spiritual angels surround us. And finally, as we begin to try to act for ourselves, independently from our parents, we are associated with angels of the natural heavens, for that is then the plane of thought and feeling in which we are most interested.

So when we reach the point of being really grown up, our thoughts and feelings are centered about our external activities and uses. Spiritually we are in Egypt. But within us are stored up, like the body of Joseph in its coffin (Genesis 50:26), what Swe-

denborg calls the “remains”—all the states and knowledges of a celestial and spiritual character which we have acquired from our earlier heavenly surroundings.

Joseph had told the children of Israel that they would someday go back to the land of Canaan. No man can be permanently satisfied with merely worldly living because as a human being instead of an animal he has higher possibilities within him. The old hymn which begins “I’m but a stranger here; heaven is my home” is based on a fundamental truth. The Hebrews were strangers in Egypt to the very last of their stay there. Sooner or later the man who has immersed himself in the business or pleasures of the world wakes up to find himself a slave, and looks for a deliverer.

Moses is the deliverer provided by the Lord to break the bonds and lead the soul back to its true home. Moses represents divine law. But this law does not come to us at first full-fledged. The person seeking a way out of his bondage is conscious first only of a small stirring of life in the recollection of the simple truths concerning what is right and fitting which are stored up in his memory from his innocent childhood—pictured by Moses in his little basket of rushes at the river’s edge. Pharaoh’s daughter symbolizes the desire to examine this new awakening, but the new life must be nourished by a deeper and more genuine affection. The Lord sees to it that the sister and the mother of Moses are at hand.

In the literal story Moses received providentially everything necessary to his preparation for his great task—the instruction from his Hebrew mother and the learning of the Egyptians. The Lord sees to it that when any young man or woman wakes to the realization that a merely worldly and selfish life is bondage and longs for the freedom of the spiritual life, the first stirrings of thought deep down in his mind are fed and protected and supplied with the necessary knowledge until they become strong enough to attempt the actual work of reformation.

Spiritual character is not developed overnight. It comes in clear stages, called by Swedenborg repentance, reformation, and regeneration. Repentance is the acknowledgment that we have been

wrong, together with the sincere effort to change ourselves. Reformation is the actual correction of our external lives according to the teachings of the Word. Regeneration is a new birth, the birth of a new will which is in accord with the Lord's will. This is something we do not create ourselves. It flows in from the Lord as we make the necessary preparation for it by repentance and reformation. Repentance and reformation are our part; regeneration is the Lord's. So the Israelites had to groan under their bondage until they were ready to make the effort to escape, to accept Moses as their leader, and to make the long, hard journey through the wilderness to the land of Canaan, the Holy Land which was their true home.

Adult

The difference in meaning between Egypt under Joseph and Egypt under a Pharaoh "which knew not Joseph" should be clearly pointed out. Then give the correspondence of Moses and, with this as a basis of interpretation, take up the general outline of the life of Moses and its meaning.

When Jacob and his family came down into Egypt and were given the best of the land to live in because of Pharaoh's gratitude to Joseph and confidence in him, we have the picture of an orderly learning period, when the Lord is supreme in our thoughts and recognition of Him directs our acquisition and ordering of facts. It is a peaceful, happy, profitable state. We are in such a state not only in our childhood but also in adult life when we read the Word daily, when we study the writings of the church, when we attend Sunday school and church, and also when for the sake of our use to the Lord and the neighbor we study or refresh our minds on subjects other than the Word which we feel will help us.

This learning state is essential to progress, but it is not to be our constant state. The Lord had promised Jacob that He would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt again. Joseph before he died had exacted a promise from them that when they returned to the Holy Land they would take his bones with them—a promise which

they fulfilled (Exodus 13:19 and Joshua 24:32). The land of Canaan was their true home. The Lord, when He called Abraham to leave Ur and go to the land of Canaan, had promised it to him and his seed forever, and had repeated this promise to Isaac and to Jacob.

Canaan has always been called “the promised land,” and recognized as a symbol of heaven. Heaven is the inheritance the Lord wishes to give each one of us. But the Lord tells us, “The kingdom of God is within you.” We do not go to heaven when we die unless heaven is within us when we die. So our Canaan is a heavenly character, and that is the object of our whole journey through life.

When the Israelites settled in Egypt, they prospered and increased greatly in numbers and possessions and, as we are all apt to do when everything goes well with us, they presently forgot that they were merely sojourners in Egypt and made no effort to return to Canaan. Then Joseph died, and his body was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt. So when we become wholly satisfied with our worldly prosperity, our higher spiritual perceptions are laid away out of sight in the memory, and we become more and more absorbed in the pursuit of the things of this world. The Israelites eventually became slaves to the monarchs who succeeded those who had originally befriended them, the later Pharaohs, who as time went on “knew not Joseph.” They themselves at last forgot even the name of their own God—Moses had to be told the name *Jehovah* by the Lord when He spoke to him at the burning bush. So if we fall in love with knowledge for its own sake or for the sake of what it can do for us in a worldly way and forget that it is given us by the Lord as a means to help us to serve Him and the neighbor, we come under the rule of a selfish and worldly principle and become slaves to it; our higher natures are made to serve worldly ends. But the Israelitish people had been chosen by the Lord to serve as a representative of His church on earth, and their history was so regulated by Him that it should represent the course of a person whose mind is not wholly closed to spiritual lessons. So they began to groan under their bondage and to long for deliv-

erance from it. Every person who really intends to lead a good life eventually becomes restless and dissatisfied with his bondage to the world.

The command of Pharaoh that all the male infants of the Hebrews should be killed may be compared with Herod's slaying of all the babes in Bethlehem. It is the effort of the worldly nature into which all of us are born to destroy every seed of spiritual truth which might grow up to threaten our selfish interests. But the Lord sees to it that a saving element is preserved—knowledge of his law. Moses represents divine law. There are two elements necessary to the preservation of this knowledge. One is a genuine affection for it, represented by the mother of Moses, which is part of the “remains” implanted in us during infancy and early childhood. The other is an affection for the material rewards of keeping the law, self-esteem and the esteem of others, represented by Pharaoh's daughter. The ark of bulrushes, covered with pitch like Noah's ark, portrays a knowledge of the mere letter of the law—the rudiments of understanding it—preserved by love of self, since ignorance of the law gets one into trouble. The timing—which brings Pharaoh's daughter down to bathe just when Moses in the ark has been left at the water's edge—is the Lord's. So our opportunities are always timed by divine providence to give us the best possibility of correcting our mistakes. Moses grew up as the foster son of Pharaoh's daughter. We might think here of the rich young man who had kept all the commandments from his youth up and came to the Lord feeling that his orderly life should be sufficient. But Moses had his own mother always in the background, and was not allowed to lose sight of his birth and allegiance.

The life of Moses is divided into three periods of forty years each: (1) The first period was spent in Egypt. It begins with his birth and preservation in the ark of bulrushes. We may see that this ark represents the simplest knowledge of what is right and fitting held together and kept afloat by the sense that one must observe the standards of his community if he is to succeed. Moses was brought up—as many of us are—in the learning of the Egyp-

tians but in the tradition of the Hebrews; that is, in worldly knowledge but with some knowledge of the Word also. This period closes with the flight of Moses after he slew an Egyptian whom he saw smiting a Hebrew—our first impulsive attempt to preserve what we feel is important to our spiritual life. (2) The second period was spent in the land of Midian, tending the flocks of Jethro, a priest of Midian, who became Moses' father-in-law. Midian was the son of Abraham by Keturah, whom he married after Sarah's death. In a good sense Midian represents a state of simple good, a thought which is further carried out by Moses' occupation there. A temporary return to the simple belief and resolution of our childhood is a necessary part of our preparation for the escape from bondage. This period closes with the call of Moses at the burning bush. (3) The third period Moses spent in the actual deliverance of his people and in leading them from Egypt to Canaan through the wilderness.

We may think of the story of the Hebrews from the time of the Exodus as the story of our attempt to attain a heavenly state of character, once we have realized that we cannot stay in mere memory-knowledge of what is good and true but must really apply it to our own personal life. This story proceeds under a series of great leaders of whom Moses is the first. The wilderness journey pictures the period of reformation when we are trying to bring our external lives into order from a principle of simple obedience to the ten commandments.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 6751: "The law Divine in a wide sense signifies the whole Word; in a sense less extended the Historic Word; in a close sense, what was written through Moses; and in the closest sense, the ten commandments written on the tables of stone upon Mount Sinai. Moses represents the law in the less wide sense, also in the close, and likewise in the closest sense."

Arcana Coelestia, n. 6723: "And she took an ark of rush. That this signifies what is of low value round about, but nevertheless derived from truth, is evident from the signification of 'an ark,' as being what is round about, or

that in which anything is enclosed; and from the signification of ‘rush,’ as being what is of low value, but nevertheless derived from truth. . . . As it was provided that Moses should represent the Lord as to the law Divine, or the Word, specifically the historic Word, it was therefore brought about that when he was an infant he was placed in a little ark, but in one of low value, because he was in his first rising, and because his being there was only a representative; but that afterward when the law Divine itself had shone forth from Mount Sinai, it was placed in an ark which was called the ‘ark of the testimony.’”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What was the condition of the Hebrews when they first settled in Egypt?
honored guests
- J. How did it change as the years went on? *became slaves*
- P. What was the Pharaoh of our lesson today afraid of? *numerical strength of Hebrews*
- P. How did he try to keep the Hebrews from increasing? *ordered death of newborn sons*
- P. What was the name of the baby boy who was saved? *Moses*
- P. What did his mother do in order to save him? *made “ark,” hid in rushes*
- P. Who found him? *Pharaoh’s daughter*
- J. What did she decide to do? *adopt him*
- P. Who was called to nurse Moses? *Moses’ mother*
- I. What does Egypt represent? *state of acquiring knowledge*
- S. What is pictured by the bondage in Egypt? *becoming enslaved to worldly knowledge or principles: e.g., business or pleasure*
- I. What does Moses represent? *divine law*