

**TUTORIAL**  
**1.26**

# God preserved the Israelites and protected Moses

See Tutorial 1.6 notes for overall instructions.

The portions of Scripture referred to in this tutorial are: ***Exodus 1, 2, 3, 4:1-17,29-31.***

## Last time

God's Narrative focused on the life of Joseph, one of Isaac's 12 sons. Hated by his brothers for his father's very evident favouritism, they sold him into slavery in Egypt. He experienced some major ups and downs, but with God orchestrating the outcomes, he was eventually promoted to governor of Egypt. In time he was reunited with his family and, at the invitation of the Pharaoh, they came and settled in Egypt.

## The Israelites are made slaves in Egypt

We pick up the Narrative again a few generations later. (Exodus 1:6-10) The descendants of Jacob or Israel, living still in Egypt, now number in the hundreds of thousands. They have not assimilated into Egyptian culture but have retained their own distinct ethnic identity and monotheistic religion, i.e. worship of the One true Creator God. As a people, they are wealthy and have become a powerful force in Egypt.

Of course the king or Pharaoh who knew Joseph is long gone and the one currently on the throne has no affection or loyalty toward the Israelites. They present a dilemma for him and the ruling elite. Their skills are needed for Egypt's economy (a growing "world" power) but militarily they represent a real threat. What if they side with an enemy during an attempted invasion? The solution, Pharaoh decides, is to retain their skills and sheer manpower, but to take away the freedom they've had to pursue their own prosperity. (Exodus 1:11-22) They are made slaves, purposely mistreated and brutalised. Their lives, the text says, were "made bitter". But the oppression does not have the desired result, at least in terms of population. As the years go by, the Israelites continue to grow in numbers. Pharaoh's iron fist clenches tighter. In the first recorded instance of ethnic cleansing, it is decreed that newborn males are to be drowned in the Nile River.

It is not difficult to see God's arch-enemy, Satan, maliciously at work in these events – fanning the hatred and encouraging the attempt to suppress, even to utterly destroy, God's people. He would not have been pleased to see Jacob's descendants growing into a real ethnic force, a nation (although yet without a homeland). He did not want to see the line flourishing by which God had said One would come to crush him, to take away his power over the earth and its inhabitants. This must be stopped. And in the Egyptians, already trapped in his web of deceit, he had willing, if unknowing, servants. Ironic, isn't it, that they thought they were the slave masters?

## **Moses is born and brought up as an Egyptian prince**

It goes without saying that none of this came as a surprise to God. He had, after all, foretold it centuries before to Abraham, saying that his descendants would be strangers in a land where they'd be oppressed as slaves. God was under no obligation to relieve their suffering or to rescue them from the fierce oppression. Of course He had made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but it's not like He's just held, in some technical objective way, by His word...although of course He will never break it. But His motivations are also very *personal*, as He's already shown us in His Narrative. He is moved by human suffering. He loves to show mercy, to be kind. He reaches out and rescues people who know that they need Him. And so He sets in motion a plan to deliver the Israelites. (Exodus 2:1-10)

A couple from the tribe of Levi have a son. After 3 months of trying to keep him hidden from the Egyptian authorities, a long-term solution must be found. Placing him in a waterproofed basket among the reeds at the edge of the Nile, his mother has her daughter watch to see what will happen. She feels that he's a special child. Will he be killed like so many other baby boys or will God do something? Pharaoh's daughter, coming with her attendants to bathe, finds the child and though realising he's Hebrew decides he's to live. She names him Moses and later adopts him as her own child. He receives an Egyptian education, probably the most advanced of any in the world at the time.

God, we'll see, was equipping and positioning Moses to contribute in His plans to rescue the Israelites. As we've noted a number of times, God gives real responsibilities to humans and we'll see as the Narrative continues, that He equips His people and draws them into efforts to rescue others in need.

## **Moses' years of exile**

As an adult, Moses starts to feel empathy for the oppressed Hebrew people with whom he shares a common ethnicity. (Exodus 2:11-22) He visits the areas where they live and work. At one point he kills an Egyptian after he's seen him

beating a Hebrew. Burying the body, Moses thinks he's in the clear, but when the news gets out, even reaching Pharaoh's ears, Moses is forced to run away...the text says to "Midian", probably somewhere to the north-east. Moses married and settled in the area, isolated for many years from both his Hebrew birth community and the Egyptian one in which he grew up.

The Narrative tells us (Exodus 2:23-25) that although Pharaoh died – to be succeeded of course by another – the misery of the Israelites did not lessen. God says that He heard their cry for help. He remembered His covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the, text says, He "knew it was time to act".

God is reminding us in His Story of things we've already noted before: He is compassionate and merciful and eager to help those who recognise their need for Him. He is also faithful and absolutely committed to the things He's said He'll do. Like Isaac on the altar, the situation of the Israelites provides us with a powerful analogy of the plight of the human race as a whole. Held in bondage by Satan's deception and in servitude to sin - the merciless taskmaster - there's no escape, no hope...except for God, unless He has a Plan, unless He sends Someone.

So God listened and began to act, but typically, it's not in a way we'd expect. One day Moses leads the flocks he's tending into the wilderness area on a mountain that will prove significant in the future – Mt Sinai (also called Horeb).

## **"I AM", recruits Moses for His rescue plan**

There he sees an extraordinary sight, a bush engulfed in flames, but without being burned up. He's awestruck when his name is called from out of the burning bush, especially when the speaker identifies Himself as no less than the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Exodus 3:1- 4:17) The Lord says that He has seen the oppression of his people and heard their cries of distress. Now He intends to rescue them and lead them out, back to the land of Canaan, currently inhabited by a number of other people groups.

But this is not just information, the Lord tells Moses that He's sending him to Pharaoh, and that He's chosen Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. Moses is horrified. He doesn't feel qualified. He has no authority, no position. God reassures Moses that He is with him and, as a sign, tells him that one day he, Moses, will lead the Israelites to this very mountain to worship God there. But Moses remains dubious. If he goes to the Israelites saying the God of their ancestors has sent him, they're going to want to know who it is, what's His name. Who should he say? In reply God says something linguistically simple but immeasurably deep in its implications. He says, "I AM WHO I AM" tell them "I AM" has sent you, and adds that this is His "eternal name" one to be remembered for all generations.

This name – which He'll use again under very different circumstances in His Narrative – is the most profound utterance possible in human language. We glimpse its infinite depths, but know we're never getting very far below the surface. It is God declaring verbally, in words, in a single name, His own eternal, absolute being...and, by extension, the complete ontological dependence on Him of everything, including us as humans.

Remarkably perhaps, despite this name, despite other signs and undertakings from God, Moses is still a reluctant. He pleads his lack of speaking ability. The interaction between them is wonderfully real and personal. God's patience finally wears thin. He asks Moses who made his mouth, whose decision was it to have humans speak or hear or see anyway? When Moses still asks for someone else to go, God agrees to allow Aaron, Moses' brother to be the spokesman.

Eventually the two of them go to the leaders of the Israelite community and tell them what God has said to Moses about rescuing them from bondage. (Exodus 4:29,30) After they see the miraculous signs from God they are convinced. The text says, "When they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshipped." (Exodus 4:31)



## DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. This lesson concludes that Satan was using the Egyptian ruler to destroy the lineage through which God had promised that the Deliverer would come. How does this strike you? Comment on how much the idea of Satan actively scheming against God's purposes comes into the normal course of your daily life. How would you try to talk about the existence of malevolent spirit beings to someone in our society, brought up with a scientific, materialistic worldview? (If necessary, do some brief research on materialism)
2. Make any observations you care to about the way that God prepared and then related to Moses. Do you think that the humility Moses displayed and his recognition of his own weakness was a necessary factor in being able to contribute to God's purposes? Can you identify a possible

principle here: a connection between our posture and attitudes on the one hand, and God involving us in what He's about on the other?



## ACTIVITIES

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1. The lesson touches on some of the incredible implications of God calling Himself "I AM". Contrast this with the worldview assumptions of existentialism (If necessary, do some brief research on existentialism). What do you think of the idea that even we, who believe in a Creator God, often default to the view that it is our existence that is most important? Write or record some notes on your thoughts about this subject.