

Chapter Eleven – The Birth of Moses

A long time after the death of Joseph and his brothers, the number of Israelites had increased greatly in Egypt. Now, a new Pharaoh came to the throne who knew nothing of Joseph and how he had saved Egypt from famine. He saw the growing number of Israelites in his land as a threat to the Egyptians. So he appointed officers to make them do all sorts of heavy work like building, making bricks and roads. But the more they were ill-treated as slaves, the more they increased. He then gave orders to the Egyptian midwives to kill all the male babies of the Israelites. But these mid-wives were good people and did not obey his order. In the end, he issued an order to all his people that every new-born Israelite boy must be thrown into the River Nile and drowned.

One of Jacob's descendants had married and had two children, a boy named Aaron and a girl named Miriam. Later his wife gave birth to a third child, a beautiful boy. He was so sweet that she hid him, instead of throwing him into the River Nile as Pharaoh had ordered. After three months, she could no longer hide him, so she made a basket of reeds and covered it with mud and pitch to make it water-proof. She put the baby inside the basket and placed it on the water among the reeds near the bank. Then she told Miriam to watch it from a distance to see what would happen. Just then, Pharaoh's daughter came down for her daily bath. She saw the basket and told one of her maids to fetch it. When she opened it and saw the baby crying, her heart was touched.

"Why," she said, "it must be one of the Jewish children."

At this moment Miriam came up and asked, "Would you like me to find a Jewish woman to take care of the child?"

"Yes, please do so," she replied. At once she ran home and brought her mother.

"Take this boy," she said, "and nurse him for me, I shall pay you well."

So the mother took her baby back and nursed him till he was grown up before handing him over to the princess who adopted him. She gave him the name of Moses, that is, one saved from the water.

When Moses grew up, he saw how his people, the Israelites, were treated as slaves, doing all the hard labour. One evening he saw one of them being cruelly whipped by an Egyptian overseer. At once he went up and stopped the man and scolded him. The overseer turned to attack him but Moses, who was a strong man, hit him so hard that he dropped to the ground. Moses went up and examined him, and was horrified to find him dead. In his terror he quickly buried the man there in the sand and hoped no one had seen him, but an Israelite witness ran away and spread the news. When the Pharaoh heard the news he ordered his arrest. Moses ran away and took refuge in the country of Midian in the north-east. He got married and stayed there as a shepherd for forty years.

Though the Pharaoh who ordered the slaughter of the Israelites' babies died years later, the life of the Israelites remained miserable under the weight of slavery in Egypt.



Baby Moses is discovered by Pharaoh's daughter

Questions:

1. Why do you think the new Pharaoh saw the Israelites as a threat?
2. Were all the Egyptians cruel at the time of Moses? Explain your answer.
3. Draw a picture of baby Moses in a basket among the reeds of a river.
4. Why did Moses run away and take refuge in the country of Midian?
5. What injustice can you see in the world today? Explain your answer.
6. What can you do to promote justice in the world?