

THE STORY OF THE EXODUS: BIBLE AND QUR'AN

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you feel when you read these texts?
- What are the major similarities and differences between them?
- Should the fact that the Exodus occupies a significant place in the Bible and the Qur'an have implications for the relationship between Jews, Christians, and Muslims? If so, what might those implications be?

The Books of Exodus and
Deuteronomy
*Jewish Publication Society
Tanakh*

The Qur'an
Suras 28, 10, 7, and 44
Based on Muhammad Asad's
The Message of the Qur'an

Exodus 1:8 A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. 1:9 And he said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. 1:10 Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground." 1:11 So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Ramses. 1:12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites. 1:22 Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

28:4 Behold, Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes... He deemed one of these groups so utterly low that He decided to slaughter their sons and spare [only] their women... 28:5 But it was God's will to bestow favor upon those [very people] who were deemed [so] utterly low in the land, and to make them forerunners in faith, heirs [to Pharaoh's glory] 28:6 and to establish them securely on earth, allowing Pharaoh and Haman¹ and their hosts to experience through those [children of Israel] the very thing against which they sought to protect themselves.

¹ Elsewhere the Qur'an identifies Haman as one of Pharaoh's chief advisors. This figure is not to be confused with the biblical figure with the same name in the Book of Esther.

The Bible

2:1 A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2:2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. 2:3 When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. 2:4 And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. 2:5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. 2:6 When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child." 2:7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" 2:8 And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 2:9 And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages."

The Qur'an

28:7 And so, [when Moses was born,] We² inspired his mother: instructing her, "Suckle him [for a time], and then, when you have cause to fear for him, cast him into the river, and have no fear and do not grieve - for We shall restore him to you, and shall make him one of Our message-bearers!" 28:8 And [some of] Pharaoh's household found [and spared] Moses. [We had willed] that Moses would become their enemy and a source of grief to them because Pharaoh and Haman and their hosts were sinners indeed! 28:9 Now the wife of Pharaoh said: "A joy to the eye [could this child be] for me and you! Slay him not: he may well be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son!" And they had no presentiment [of what Moses was to become]. 28:10 On the morrow, however, an aching void grew up in the heart of Moses' mother, and she would indeed have disclosed all about him had We not endowed her heart with enough strength to keep alive her faith [in God's promise].

² "We" in the Arabic language is an expression of respect.

The Bible

So the woman took the child and nursed it. ^{2:10}When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

^{2:11}Some time after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.

^{2:12}He turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. ^{2:13}When he went out the next day, he found two Hebrews fighting; so he said to the offender, "Why do you strike your fellow?" ^{2:14}He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known! ^{2:15}When Pharaoh learned of the matter, he sought to kill Moses; but Moses fled from Pharaoh. He arrived in the land of Midian, and sat down beside a well.

The Qur'an

^{28:11}And so she said to his sister, "Follow him." And [the girl] watched the baby from afar, while they [who had taken him in] were not aware of it. ^{28:12}Now from the very beginning

We caused Moses to refuse the breast of [Egyptian] nurses; and [when his sister came to know this,] she said: "Shall I guide you to a family that might rear him for you, and look after him with good will?"

^{28:13}And thus We restored Moses to his mother, so that her eye might be gladdened, and that she might grieve no longer, and that she might know that God's promise always comes true - even though most of them know it not! ^{28:14}Now when [Moses] reached full manhood and had become mature [of mind], We bestowed upon him the ability to judge [between right and wrong] as well as [innate] knowledge: for thus do We reward the doers of good.

^{28:15}And [one day] he entered the city at a time when [most of] its people were [resting in their houses,] unaware of what was going on [in the streets]; and there he encountered two men fighting with one another - one of his own people, and the other of his enemies.

The Bible

^{3:1}Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ^{3:2}An angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. ^{3:3}Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" ^{3:4}When Adonai saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." ^{3:5}And He said, "Do not come closer...." ^{3:7}And Adonai ... [said to Moses], "I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. ^{3:8}I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey ^{3:10}Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt."

The Qur'an

And the one who belonged to his own people cried out to him for help against him who was of his enemies - whereupon Moses struck him down with his fist, and [thus] brought about his end. [But then Moses] said [to himself]: "This is of Satan's doing! Verily, he is an open foe, leading [man] astray!" ^{28:16}[And] he prayed: O my Sustainer! Verily, I have sinned against myself! Grant me, then, Your forgiveness!" And He forgave him - for, verily, He alone is truly forgiving, a dispenser of grace. ^{28:17}Said he: "O my Sustainer! [I vow] by all the blessings which You have bestowed on me: Nevermore shall I aid such as are lost in sin!" ^{28:18}And next morning he found himself in the city, looking fearfully about him, when lo! the one who had sought his help the day before [once again] cried out to him [for help - whereupon] Moses said to him: "Behold, you are indeed, most clearly, deeply in the wrong!" ^{28:19}But then, as soon as he was about to lay violent hands on the man who was their [common] enemy, the latter exclaimed:

The Bible

^{4:1}But Moses spoke up and said, “What if they do not believe me and do not listen to me, but say: ‘Adonai did not appear to you?’”
^{4:2}Adonai said to him, “What is that in your hand?” And he replied, “A rod.”
^{4:3}He said, “Cast it on the ground.” He cast it on the ground and it became a snake; and Moses recoiled from it.
^{4:4}Then Adonai said to Moses, “Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail”—he put out his hand and seized it, and it became a rod in his hand—
^{4:5}“that they may believe that Adonai, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, did appear to you.”
^{4:6}Adonai said to him further, “Put your hand into your bosom.” He put his hand into his bosom; and when he took it out, his hand was encrusted with snowy scales!
^{4:7}And He said, “Put your hand back into your bosom.” —He put his hand back into his bosom; and when he took it out of his bosom, there it was again like the rest of his body.
^{4:21}And Adonai said to Moses, “When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh

The Qur’an

“O Moses, do you intend to slay me as you slew another man yesterday? Your sole aim is to become a tyrant in this land, for you do not care to be of those who would set things to rights!”
^{28:20}And [then and there] a man came running from the farthest end of the city, and said: “O Moses! Behold, the great ones [of the kingdom] are deliberating upon your case with a view to killing you! Be gone, then: verily, I am of those who wish you well!”
^{28:21}So he went forth from there, looking fearfully about him, and prayed: “O my Sustainer! Save me from all evildoing folk!”
^{28:22}And as he turned his face towards Midian, he said [to himself]: “It may well be that my Sustainer will [thus] guide me onto the right path!”
^{28:29}And when Moses had fulfilled his term [working for his father-in-law, Jethro], and was wandering with his family [in the desert], he perceived a fire on the slope of Mount Sinai [and so] he said to his family: “Wait here. Behold, I perceive a fire [far away]; perhaps I may bring you from there some tidings, or [at least] a burning brand from the fire, so that you might warm yourselves.”

The Bible

all the marvels that I have put within your power. I, however, will stiffen his heart so that he will not let the people go.

^{5:1}Afterward Moses and [his brother] Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, “Thus says Adonai, the God of Israel:

Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness.” ^{5:2}But Pharaoh said, “Who is Adonai that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know Adonai, nor will I let Israel go.”

^{5:20}As [the foremen of the Israelites] left Pharaoh’s presence, they came upon Moses and Aaron standing in their path, ^{5:21}and they said to them, “May Adonai look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers—putting a sword in their hands to slay us.” ^{5:22}Then Moses returned to Adonai and said, “O Adonai, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me?

^{5:23}Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people.”

The Qur’an

^{28:30}But when he came close to it, a call was sounded from the right-side bank of the valley, out of the tree [burning] on blessed ground: “O Moses! Verily, I am God, the Sustainer of all the worlds!”

^{28:31}And [then He said]: “Throw down your staff!” But as soon as [Moses] saw it move rapidly, as if it were a snake, he drew back [in terror], and did not [dare to] return. [And God spoke to him again:] “O Moses! Draw near, and have no fear for, behold, you are of those who are secure [in this world and in the next]! ^{28:32}[And now] put your hand into your bosom: it will come forth [shining] white, without blemish. And [henceforth] hold your arm close to yourself, free of all fear.” These, then, shall be the two signs [of your bearing a message] from your Sustainer to Pharaoh and his great ones - for, behold, they are people depraved!”

^{10:88}And Moses prayed: “O our Sustainer! You have truly granted splendor and riches to Pharaoh in his lifetime and to his great ones with the result, O our Sustainer, that they are leading [others] astray from Your path!

The Bible

^{6:1}Then Adonai said to Moses, “You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.”

^{7:8}Adonai said to Moses and Aaron, ^{7:9}“When Pharaoh speaks to you and says, ‘Produce your marvel,’ you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it down before Pharaoh.’ It shall turn into a serpent.” ^{7:10}So Moses and Aaron came before Pharaoh and did just as Adonai had commanded: Aaron cast down his rod in the presence of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and it turned into a serpent. ^{7:11}Then Pharaoh, for his part, summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and the Egyptian magicians, in turn, did the same with their spells; ^{7:12}each cast down his rod, and they turned into serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed their rods.

^{7:19}And Adonai said to Moses, “Say to Aaron: Take your rod and hold out your arm over the waters of Egypt—its rivers, its canals, its ponds, all its bodies of water—that they may turn to blood; there shall be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.”

The Qur’an

O our Sustainer! Wipe out their riches, and harden their hearts, so that they will not develop faith and perceive the grievous suffering [that awaits them]!” ^{10:89}[God] answered: “Your prayer is accepted! Continue, then, [you and Aaron] steadfastly on the right way, and follow not the path of those who have no knowledge [of right and wrong].”

^{7:103}...We sent Moses [and his brother, Aaron] with Our messages to Pharaoh and his great ones, who willfully rejected them. Behold what happened in the end to those spreaders of corruption! ^{7:104}And Moses said, “O Pharaoh! Verily, I am an apostle from the Sustainer of all the worlds, ^{7:105}so constituted that I cannot say anything about God but the truth. I have now come to you with clear evidence from your Sustainer: Let, the children of Israel go with me!” ^{7:106}Then [Pharaoh] replied, “If you have come with a sign, produce it - if you are a man of truth!” ^{7:107}Then [Moses] threw down his staff, and lo! it became a serpent, plainly visible; ^{7:108}and he drew forth his hand, and lo! it appeared [shining] white to the beholders.

The Bible

^{7:20}Moses and Aaron did just as Adonai commanded: he lifted up the rod and struck the water in the Nile in the sight of Pharaoh and his courtiers, and all the water in the Nile was turned into blood ^{7:21}and the fish in the Nile died.... ^{7:22}But when the Egyptian magicians did the same with their spells, Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed them—as Adonai had spoken. ^{7:23}Pharaoh turned and went into his palace, paying no regard even to this. [And God sent six more plagues against Egypt—Frogs, Vermin, Wild Animals, Cattle Disease, Boils, Hail—and after each Pharaoh promised to let the Israelites leave, but changed his mind.] ^{10:7}Pharaoh's courtiers said to him, "How long shall this one be a snare to us? Let the men go to worship Adonai their God! Are you not yet aware that Egypt is lost?" ^{10:8}So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh and he said to them, "Go, worship Adonai your God! Who are the ones to go?" ^{10:9}Moses replied, "We will all go, young and old: we will go with our sons and daughters, our flocks and herds; for we must observe Adonai's festival."

The Qur'an

^{7:109}The great ones among Pharaoh's people said, "Verily, this is indeed a sorcerer of great knowledge, ^{7:110}who wants to drive you out of your land!" [Pharaoh asked:] "What, then, do you advise?" ^{7:111}They answered: "Let him and his brother wait awhile, and send heralds to all cities ^{7:112}who shall bring before you every sorcerer of great knowledge." ^{7:113}And the sorcerers came to Pharaoh [and] said, "Verily, we ought to have a great reward if it is we who prevail." ^{7:114}[Pharaoh] replied, "Yes; and, verily, you shall be among those who are near to me." ^{7:115}Pharaoh's sorcerers said, "O Moses! Either you shall throw [your staff first], or we shall [be the first to] throw." ^{7:116}He answered: "You throw [first]." And when they threw down [their staffs], they cast a spell upon the people's eyes, and struck them with awe, and produced mighty sorcery. ^{7:117}And [then] We commanded Moses, "Throw down your staff!" And lo! it swallowed up all their deceptions:

The Bible

^{10:10}But he said to them, “Adonai be with you the same as I mean to let your children go with you! Clearly, you are bent on mischief. ^{10:11}No! You menfolk go and worship Adonai, since that is what you want.” And they were expelled from Pharaoh’s presence.

^{10:15}[And God sent a plague of locusts] so that nothing green was left, of tree or grass of the field, in all the land of Egypt. [Then came a plague of darkness.]

^{11:1}And Adonai said to Moses, “I will bring but one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that he shall let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you out of here one and all.

^{12:21}Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. ^{12:22}Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.

The Qur’an

^{7:118}whereupon the truth was established, and all that Pharaoh’s sorcerers had been doing proved vain. ^{7:119}Thus they were vanquished there and then. Utterly humiliated, ^{7:120}the sorcerers fell down, and prostrating themselves ^{7:121}exclaimed, “We have come to believe in the Sustainer of all the worlds, ^{7:122}the Sustainer of Moses and Aaron!” ^{7:123}Pharaoh responded, “You have come to believe in him though I have not given you permission? Behold, this is indeed a plot which you have cunningly devised in [my] city in order to drive out its people! But in time you shall come to know, [my revenge]. ^{7:124}Most certainly, I shall cut off your hands and your feet in great numbers, because of [your] perverseness, and then I shall most certainly crucify you, in great numbers, all together!” ^{7:125}They answered, “Verily, unto our Sustainer do we turn —^{7:126}for you take vengeance on us only because we have come to believe in our Sustainer’s messages as soon as they came to us. O our Sustainer! Shower us with patience in adversity, and make us die as men who have surrendered themselves to You!”

The Bible

12: 23For when Adonai goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and Adonai will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

12:8They shall eat the flesh [of the passover offering] that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.

12: 24“You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. 12:27...you shall say, ‘It is the passover sacrifice to Adonai, because He passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.’”12:29In the middle of the night Adonai struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle. 12:30And Pharaoh arose in the night, with all his courtiers and all the Egyptians—because there was a loud cry in Egypt; for there was no house where there was not someone dead.

The Qur’an

7:127And the great ones among Pharaoh’s people asked him, “Will you allow Moses and his people to spread corruption on earth, and to [cause your people to] forsake you and your gods?” [Pharaoh] replied, “We shall slay their sons in great numbers and shall spare [only] their women: for, verily, we hold sway over them!” 7:128[And] Moses said to his people: “Turn to God for aid, and have patience in adversity. Verily, all the earth belongs to God: He gives it as a heritage - to such as He wills of His servants; and the future belongs to the God-conscious!” 7:129[But the children of Israel] said, “We have suffered hurt before and since you have come to us!” [Moses] replied, “It may well be that your Sustainer will destroy your foe and make you inherit the earth: and thereupon He will see how you act.” 7:130We overwhelmed Pharaoh’s people with drought and scarcity of fruits, so that they might take it to heart. 7:131But whenever good fortune alighted upon them, they would say, “This is [but] our due,”

The Bible

^{12:31}He summoned Moses and Aaron in the night and said, “Up, depart from among my people, you and the Israelites with you! Go, worship Adonai as you said!
^{12:32}Take also your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone! And may you bring a blessing upon me also!”
^{14:21}Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and Adonai drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, ^{14:22}and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ^{14:23}The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and horsemen. ^{14:26}Then Adonai said to Moses, “Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen.” ^{14:27}Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But Adonai hurled the Egyptians into the sea.

The Qur’an

and whenever affliction befell them, they would blame their evil fortune on Moses and those who followed him. Oh, verily, their [evil] fortune had been decreed by God - but most of them knew it not. ^{7:132}And they said [to Moses], “Whatever sign you may produce before us in order to cast a spell upon us, we shall not believe you!” ^{7:133}Thereupon We let loose upon them floods, and [plagues of] locusts, and lice, and frogs, and [water turning into] blood – distinct signs [all]: but they gloried in their arrogance, for they were people lost in sin. ^{7:134}And as each plague struck them, they would cry: “O Moses, pray for us to your Sustainer on the strength of the covenant which He has made with you! If you remove this plague from us, we will truly believe in you and will let the children of Israel go with you!” ^{7:135}But whenever We removed the plague from them, giving them time to make good their promise, they would break their word. ^{7:136}And so We inflicted Our retribution on them, and caused them to drown in the sea, because they had been heedless of Our messages.

The Bible

^{14:28}The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen— Pharaoh’s entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.

Deuteronomy ^{7:6}For you are a people consecrated to Adonai your God: of all the peoples on earth Adonai your God chose you to be His treasured people. ^{7:7}It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that Adonai set His heart on you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples; ^{7:8}but it was because Adonai favored you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that Adonai freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

The Qur’an

^{7:137}By contrast, to the people who [in the past] had been deemed utterly low, We gave as their heritage the eastern and western parts of the land that We had blessed. And [thus] your Sustainer’s good promise to the children of Israel was fulfilled as a result of their patience in adversity. And We utterly destroyed all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought, and all that they had built. ^{7:138}And We brought the children of Israel across the sea....

^{44:30}And, indeed, We delivered the children of Israel from the shameful suffering ^{44:31}[inflicted on them] by Pharaoh, seeing that he was truly outstanding among those who waste their own selves; ^{44:32}and, indeed, We chose them knowingly above all other people, ^{44:33}and gave them such signs [of Our grace] as would clearly presage a test [of their ultimate faith].