

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 Book of Exodus
*Jewish Publication Society
Tanakh*

1:9 And [Pharaoh]... said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us.
1:11 So they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor; and they built garrison cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Ramses. 1:22 Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

3:7 And Adonai ... [said to Moses] ... 3:10 Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall free My people, the Israelites, from Egypt." 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."

The Qur'an
Based on Muhammad Asad's
The Message of the Qur'an

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

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.”
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...”
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 he changed his mind every time.]
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.
12:8 They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.

The Qur’an

7:103...We² 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!”
7:128 [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.”

²“We” in the Arabic language is used as an expression of respect.

The Bible

^{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.^{12:23}For 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.^{12:24}“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.’” ^{12:29}In the middle of the night Adonai struck down all the first-born in the land of Egypt.... ^{12:31}... [Pharaoh] 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!

The Qur’an

^{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. ^{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.

The Bible

^{14:23}The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and 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. ^{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.

The Qur'an

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].

(For a more extended comparison of the Exodus in the Bible and Qur'an see www.exodusconversations.com.)