

# “Out of Africa”

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Exodus 2: 5-15 CEV

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Children have always had a challenging time interpreting the Bible and have come up with some interesting interpretations of the stories. These are actual essay answers from Bible classes about the first two Books of the Bible, Genesis and Exodus:

- Noah’s wife was called Joan of Ark.
- Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread which is made without any ingredients.
- The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert.
- Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the 10 Amendments.
- The First Commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.
- The Seventh Commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.
- Moses died before he ever reached Canada.
- Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the Battle of Geritol.
- The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he actually obeyed him.

It is obvious that interpretation is important when it comes to reading the Bible. One of the things I love about the Bible is that it doesn’t gloss over the failings of its heroes. It tells us when people were good and it tells us when they were bad or in some cases downright evil. It even tells us when the heroes of the Bible were complete failures as well. As a flawed human being, I really appreciate that kind of honesty in Scripture.

One Bible character who both succeeded and failed was Moses. I don’t know about you but I can’t think of Moses without seeing Charlton Heston in the film the Ten Commandments.



Great big, powerful Moses, larger than life. Solid as a rock. It is hard to imagine him any other way. But that description would hardly give a true idea of who Moses was. Moses was a walking contradiction of good and bad.

The very short version of the Life of Moses is that he was born a Hebrew in Egypt, that his mother put him in a papyrus basket and floated him out into the reeds of the Nile River to try and save him from their Egyptian rulers who were killing all the male Hebrew babies in an attempt to try and control the rapidly growing Hebrew population of Egypt. So Moses was born as an African Jew under slavery to the Egyptians.



We also know that Moses was fished out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him and named him Moses. As her adopted son, Moses grew up as a Prince of Egypt with all the power and privilege that entailed.

Everything seemed to be going well until one-day Moses saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. The Bible leads us to believe that Moses knew he was Hebrew by his time but was still living as an Egyptian Prince. Looking both ways to make sure no one was watching Moses murdered the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand.



Later, he came upon two Hebrews fighting. When he confronted them one of the Hebrews said, "Are you thinking of killing me like you killed the Egyptian?" Realizing that his crime was known, and fearing the wrath of Pharaoh, Moses fled Egypt in panic.

There was nothing honourable about his actions. Moses must have seen thousands of Hebrews being beaten while growing up. It was an everyday occurrence. He never did anything before. The Bible clearly says this was a premeditated act. It says, "*glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.*"

It wasn't an attempt to get the Hebrews to rise up against their persecutors. It was the murder of someone he had power over as an Egyptian Prince. He hid the evidence and was continuing with his privileged life until he found out that his crime had been discovered. At this point we

can truly say that Moses was hardly a candidate to lead God's people out of their captivity.

*And yet in Hebrews 11 it says: Moses is a Man of faith!* How could a murderer be a man of faith? Where is the good news in all this mess? The good news is this, and if you remember nothing else from today's message I want it to be what I say next....God sees the potential hiding deep inside us and not just who we are now.

As Moses was running away from Pharaoh like a puppy with his tail between his legs, God saw the mighty leader that would later stand nose to nose in defiance of Pharaoh. God knew that this African born Jew and former adopted Egyptian Prince, had the faith and potential to liberate the Hebrew slaves and take them to the very edge of the Promised Land.

God has specialized in using fallen characters to do great things. God used the murderer and adulterer David to become Israel's greatest King. God used the murderer and persecutor of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, to spread Christianity throughout Europe and leave us with great writings that still guide us today. A woman of questionable character, Mary Magdalene, became Jesus's second female disciple after his mother Mary.

We can give thanks to God that God is the God of second chances, and third chances and so on. God's grace and forgiveness are the greatest blessings we have ever received.

Moses desperately needed a second chance. He was hiding in the desert with his new Midianite wife Zipporah. He even named their first son, Gershom, meaning "I have become an alien in a foreign land." He was a refugee from Africa, hiding in a foreign land, fearing for his life.

But God saw past Moses' failure. God saw past the fact that Moses was not an eloquent speaker and that he was slow of speech and tongue. God patiently listened to Moses's first request to send someone else and instead provided Aaron to go along to Egypt and speak for him. God saw the potential that was hiding deep inside Moses and chose this imperfect man to lead the Hebrew slaves out of Africa after 430 years of slavery.

When Pharaoh changed his mind and sent his Army after the Israelites, God used Moses and Aaron to open the waters of the Red Sea to allow them to pass through safely and escape the Egyptian Army. The waters closed over the pursuing Egyptian army killing them all.

The Bible has two layers of stories. The "Upper Story" or the big picture that we are concentrating on and the "Lower Story" that is often confusing and troubling. It can be easy to get caught up in the lesser story and miss the message of the big story.

With Moses there are a couple of really disturbing smaller stories that are impossible for me to explain this morning. After their escape from Egypt the Israelites fought a number of enemies. One nation they battled with were the people of Moses's wife, the Midianites. After defeating them and killing all the males Moses decided that wasn't enough and had all the women killed as well. Makes his first murder seem minor doesn't it.

I have also never been a fan of the 10<sup>th</sup> plague. For me, for God to kill the first born of the Egyptians is as hard to come to terms with as was the Egyptians killing of the Hebrew children. And yet, this Passover plague is central to the Jewish faith and it led to the liberation of the slaves. And then there was God drowning the entire Egyptian Army and their horses.

The lower story is one messed up story. And yet, the Upper Story is a message of liberation and providence for an enslaved nation. This is also the story where God reveals the name YHWH, "I Am Who I Am" the self-existent one. For the first time God had a name.

I don't know about you but like Moses I have messed up at times in my life. I have done things that I am not proud of and I can relate to the fear and anxiety that Moses expressed. And I am thankful that God sees our potential and doesn't just wash his hands of us when we mess up. Instead of getting stuck in the messy lower story we need to see that the upper story is telling us about providence, and second chances...and forgiveness.

When God calls us to do something, do we say, "Here I am Lord," or do we turn and run away? When God asks us to do something do we say, "not me Lord," or do we say, "Wow, God must see the potential in me and even though I have doubts about whether I can do this, God will help me to accomplish my mission."

Sometimes we may fail. That is fine, we learn far more from our failures than our successes. When we mess up, we need God's forgiveness, we need to confess our failings, get up of the ground, dust ourselves off and step out in faith along the path God wants us to walk.

Now we may never have committed murder. But the first chapter of Romans tells us that we are just as guilty as Moses, or David or Paul. It mentions murder but it also mentions on the same level, envy, gossip, deceit, faithlessness, slander, insolence, arrogance and disobeying our parents.

We humans like to rank sins. It makes us feel better if we think that someone else's sin is worse than ours. This passage tells us that to God sin is all the same. We still need forgiveness. The Good news is that when we ask for forgiveness and allow God to shape us, we can literally change

the world around us by spreading God's love and compassion to those we meet in our daily lives.

The miracle of God's grace is not that we become something we previously were not; the miracle is that by grace we are freed to live out the full potential of what God has already created us to be.

Remember the only thing I asked you to remember from today's message is: **God sees the potential hiding deep inside us and not just who we are now.** And that is something to be thankful for.