

Discussion Guide: *The Prince of Egypt*

This guide is designed for a discussion of DreamWorks' *The Prince of Egypt* (1998). Beyond its stunning animation and unforgettable music, the film serves as a helpful lens for exploring the Exodus story, the nature of divine power, and the complex balance of creative license in biblical storytelling.

Highlights

As you watch, consider these elements:

- Notice how the film opens with the epic song “Deliver Us,” capturing both agonizing pain and steadfast faith. How does this set the tone for how the Israelites experience their suffering?
- Pay close attention to how the film visually and audibly portrays God’s presence. Notice how the burning bush is portrayed as an ethereal, awe-inspiring mist that expands and contracts, alongside the clever choice to have the voice of God be the same as Moses (both voiced by Val Kilmer)
- Watch how Moses is portrayed when called by God. Unlike the ultra-confident heroes of older Hollywood portrayals of the Exodus, observe his sense of inadequacy and limitations.
- Listen closely to Hans Zimmer’s (*Dune*, *The Pirates of the Caribbean*, *the Dark Knight Trilogy*, and more!) legendary score and Stephen Schwartz’ (*Wicked*) lyrics. Notice how his leitmotif (recurring musical theme) for God’s presence weaves regional music and haunting vocals together to represent both the meekness and the overwhelming power of the Lord.

Discussion

- Hollywood adaptations inevitably take creative liberties, and here, that looks like inventing a deep fraternal bond between Moses and Ramses and depicting Moses as unaware of his Hebrew heritage early on.

What sort of creative license should we be willing to accept when watching biblical adaptations? Where do filmmakers' choices help us see the story in a fresh way versus when do they cross the line into problematic theology?

- Moses repeatedly questions his ability to lead, focusing often on his own weaknesses rather than the power of God working through him.

How does *The Prince of Egypt* offer a contrast to the cinematic archetype/trope of the heroic savior? In what areas of our own lives do we rely on our personal strength rather than trusting what God can do through our weakness, and how is

this portrayal of Moses a good example for all of us in our own struggle with our limits?

- The film's famous anthem declares that "there can be miracles when you believe," suggesting that our belief is the catalyst for divine action.

How might this be both biblically inaccurate and a little problematic, theologically speaking? How does the Bible clarify who actually initiates wonders and delivers God's people?

- In this telling of the Exodus, we see the story revolve around the broken relationship between Moses and Ramses, brothers who end up as the Pharaoh of Egypt and God's chosen leader to rescue the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt.

How does the personal tragedy of Moses and Ramses mirror the larger spiritual conflict of the story? Why is it so difficult for those holding earthly power to surrender it, and what does the film suggest about the human cost of empire versus the freedom found in following God?

Scripture Connections

- **On Human Inadequacy and Divine Calling:** *Exodus 3:11* ("Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh..."); take some time to read the entirety of Moses' encounter at the Burning Bush (3:1-15).
- **On God as the True Deliverer:** *Micah 6:4* ("I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you...")
- **A Warning Against the Security of Empire:** *Isaiah 31:1, 3* ("Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of her riders... But the Egyptians are mere mortals and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the Lord stretches out his hand, he who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together.")