

Folk Song: Go Down, Moses

The song, "Go Down, Moses," is an iconic *spiritual* (a religious folk song that is closely associated with the enslavement of African people in the American South). Originally written by an American slave around 1835, its lyrics are an adaptation of the biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt found in the book of Exodus.

Exodus 5:1 *"And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness."*

Even though the song lyrics speak of the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, it also held a dual meaning for enslaved African Americans experiencing the harshness of slavery under their cruel masters.

The spiritual quickly became connected with the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes used by slaves to escape captivity. Harriet Tubman was quoted as saying she used "Go Down, Moses" as one of two code songs for people to communicate when fleeing Maryland to free states.

Its refrain, "Go Down, Moses! Way down in Egypt's land!" became a rallying cry and an anthem of freedom from slavery and oppression. The spiritual is a testament to perseverance and courage in the face of adversity and has given hope and strength to generations of people in their fight for freedom, equality, and justice.

Go Down, Moses

Unison N.C. F#m G#m7(b5) F# Bm F# *Parts* N.C. C#7 F#m

1 When Is - rael was in E - gypt's land, Let my peo - ple go;
 2 The Lord told Mo - ses what to do, Let my peo - ple go;
 3 They jour - neyed on at his com - mand, Let my peo - ple go;
 4 Oh, let us all from bond - age flee, Let my peo - ple go;

N.C. *Unison* F#m G#m7(b5) F#m Bm F# *Parts* N.C. C#7 F#m

op - pressed so hard they could not stand, Let my peo - ple go.
 to lead the He - brew chil - dren through, Let my peo - ple go.
 and came at length to Ca - naan's land, Let my peo - ple go.
 and let us all in Christ be free, Let my peo - ple go.

Refrain F#m Bm Bm6 F# C# F#m F#m7 Bm

Go down, Mo - ses, way down in E - gypt's land;
 (go down)

F#m F#m E Bm7 D Bm6 F#m C# C#7 F#m

tell old Phar - aoh: Let my peo - ple go!