

READY-to-GO SCRIPTURE SKITS

...that teach serious stuff

The Sequel



By Michael Theisen

Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits

(That Teach Serious Stuff)

The Sequel

For Christopher Michael Theisen,
a gentle soul, a listening ear.
May your becoming soon enlighten the world
as your presence has enlightened mine
for the past twenty years.

And with thankfulness and love to my wife, Mary,
and children, Chris, David, and Rachel,
for the time you give me to act up.

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saint mary's press

The publishing team included Laurie Delgatto, development editor; Lorraine Kilmartin, reviewer; C. J. Potter, illustrator and cover designer; prepress and manufacturing coordinated by the prepublication and production services departments of Saint Mary's Press.

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Printed in the United States of America

3438

ISBN 978-0-88489-896-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Theisen, Michael.

Ready-to-go Scripture skits (that teach serious stuff) : the sequel / Michael Theisen.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-88489-896-2 (spiral)

1. Drama in Christian education. 2. Bible plays, American. I. Title.

BV1534.4.T45 2005

268'.433—dc22

2005005100

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Introduction

Before the Curtain Rises

Theme: The what and why of skits

Are You Ready for a Completely Different Way of Teaching?

Welcome back to *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits (That Teach Serious Stuff)—The Sequel*, the book that will help you to engage young people in examining and exploring the Scriptures in a way that will have parents and neighbors wondering, “Is it legal to have so much fun at church?” The answer, of course, is absolutely, positively, *we hope so*.

By now you are probably wondering, along with those suspicious neighbors and quizzical parents: *Why skits?* Don't our young people act up enough already?

Let's answer that question with a little memory test:

1. Do you remember reading your high school text on Church history?
2. Do you remember the lecture on the synoptic Gospels?

3. How about the seven deadly sins?
4. The corporal works of mercy?
5. The Ninety-five Theses?
6. What did you get from your true love on the eleventh day of Christmas?

Now see how you do in answering these questions:

1. Would you characterize your first role in a play as that of an animal, a vegetable, or a mineral?
2. Can you still recall the one line you were assigned in the fifth-grade production?
3. Do you secretly crave reliving those silly retreat and camp skits, even as an adult?

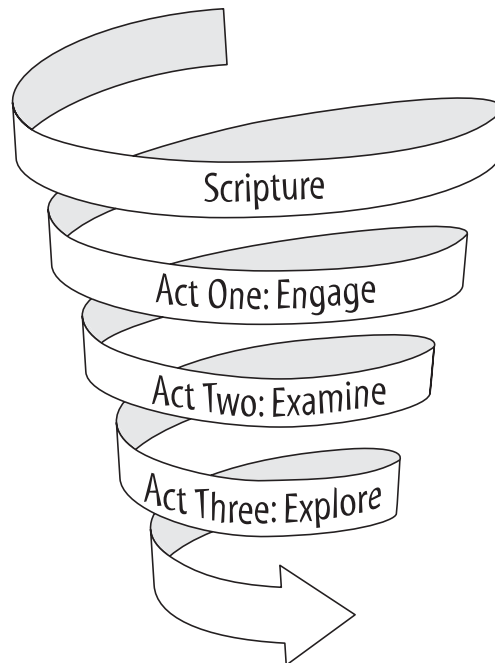
If you are like most people . . . uh, scratch that, because if you *were* like most people, you'd be playing golf or taking a nap instead of reading this intro. The point is, people remember and recall what they *experience* much more easily than what they are told or what they read. If you doubt that, spend five minutes listening to any teenager in the universe talk about what he or she remembers from two years ago. Most likely it's *not* going to fit under the category "All-Time Favorite Lecture" or "The Textbook I Continue to Read Each Night." Experience-based learning is a technique we learning theorists refer to as active learning, and for many reasons, it works with young people (it actually works with old people too, but they don't readily admit that).

The fact that you can remember your starring role in your second-grade Christmas pageant—and that you forgot all your lines after tripping and falling on the way to the manger—has a lot to do with the fact that you were actively engaged in that experience. Even though you continue to confuse "starring role" with actually portraying "a star," that shining moment is still perched at the top of your memory list, outplac-ing chapter six of your Church history text. To a large extent, that is because drama uses just about all your senses and puts you "out there," taking a risk onstage, entertaining a crowd, and possibly even teaching a lesson (insert "gasp!" here).

To put it simply, *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* engages the participants in an active form of learning that is hard to beat. It achieves MLP (maximum learning potential) through FLP (full laugh potential). Plus the skits are so off-the-wall that you will have no problem involving just about everybody in your group one way or another (actually most of the participants will have no choice in the matter!). Best of all, the Ready-to-Go

Scripture Skits are just that: ready-to-go. Few props are used, no lines need to be memorized, and you do not have to worry about the special lighting effects blowing the circuit breaker. In fact, producing them is the closest you'll come to that memorable experience of your second-grade Christmas pageant—only this time, you will be instructing people to fall down!

Behind the Scenes: The Three E's of Learning



There are three acts, or movements, to each session in *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits—The Sequel*. Each act is part of a continuous learning process designed to take the audience to a deeper level, until, by the end of act 3, they are completely hypnotized and under your total control. Before you wake them from that hypnotic state, I recommend that you inform each of them of a different gift you'd like to receive next Christmas. And while you are contemplating that Christmas list, read on to find out a little more about the three E's that make up each session.



Most moments of learning start here, at the point of engaging the learner. Unfortunately many end here as well because we dismiss some of the more creative ideas that grab young people's attention these days, like bungee jumping and Splatball. Act 1 is all about grabbing their attention and holding on to it, but unlike those over-the-top methods, it does not risk their lives (their reputations might be another matter).

Each session begins with the director (a.k.a.: you) asking for volunteers from the audience (a.k.a.: them), which quickly moves into the director grabbing volunteers from the audience and assigning them the various roles called for in the Scripture skit. The director then tells the actors to wait offstage until their parts are announced, which is just a nice way of telling them to get out of the way until they are needed. Next the director (a.k.a.: the one smart enough to be reading the script rather than acting it out) instructs the actors *and* the audience members that each must do *exactly what is read, when it is read*. The director will know when someone is supposed to act because in the script, the action statements are followed by ellipsis points (a.k.a.: three dots that look like this: . . .).

Whenever there are ellipsis points, the director pauses—and in some cases needs to repeat the action statement . . . and in some cases needs to repeat the action statement—to signal that the action must be performed before the show can go on. For example, the director might read, “They froze in their tracks . . . ,” and while pausing notice that the actors are still moving. In that case, the director might need to say again, loudly, “*I said, ‘FROZE in their tracks . . . ,’*” while giving them the evil director’s eye that literally does freeze them in their tracks.

Because each Scripture skit is a bit different from the biblical story most of us hear at church (okay, okay, *a lot* different), it will not only *keep* the actors paying attention, it will *require* them to pay attention in order to keep up with what is going on and what is being asked of them. The same holds true for the unsuspecting audience members who mistakenly think they are safe because they are not onstage [*insert diabolical laugh here*]. The director knows that *no one is safe* from a Scripture skit, especially the audience. That is because many of the skits require the audience to be fully, consciously, and actively involved and on their best behavior, ready to be called on at any moment to do something really important (kind of like being in church on Sunday!).

Another feature of the Scripture skits is the cue card. This is a set of lines that a specific actor must say out loud, usually in the voice of someone else, such as a famous actor or cartoon character. You might find it helpful, while twisting someone's arm to volunteer for a cue card role, to make sure that the person is able and willing to speak in the required voice. On the other hand, it can be really funny to watch a junior high girl discover at the last second that she must speak like Darth Vader. No matter which strategy you choose for maintaining your FLP, when it comes time for a cue card, simply hold the book in front of the actor who must read it and point to the box that the lines appear in. Because these Scripture skits are ready-to-go, they give no time for line memorization or character development—it's improv or bust! The point of act 1 is to grab the attention of the audience and of the actors.



The point of act 2 is to help them continue their star trek, leading them to new frontiers, where no one has gone before. All bad *Star Trek* metaphors aside, the real point is to take them to another level of insight regarding the Scripture story they just acted out and its application for life today.

First the audience is asked to hear the story one more time, as it actually appears in the Scriptures. I suggest that, if possible, you use the New American Bible translation because it's the one we hear proclaimed at Mass. It's always a good idea to have a young person read the passage, and it's an even better idea to make sure that that person *can* read it (as well as pronounce all the words in it). So when you first gather the group together, even before recruiting your actors, recruit someone to do the Scripture reading during act 2, and give that person a Bible with the reading marked, to look over while you recruit the actors. That will do two things: it will give the young person time to familiarize himself or herself with the reading, and it will give you a free hand for holding the *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits* book!

After the proclamation of the reading, a series of commentaries give some important background and insights into the historical origins of the story as well as its meaning for us today. This is the part of the session where the robot from *Lost in Space* would yell mechanically: "*Danger, Will Robinson. Danger.*" Why? Because you may be tempted to begin lecturing your audience back to la-la land. To avoid falling into that old trap, try to spice up these important points a little by *keeping your*

audience involved. Each commentary is designed as a little “byte” that is easily swallowed. Each “byte” is highlighted with a boldfaced subhead. You are strongly encouraged to type or write each of those boldfaced subheads on a separate 8½-by-11-inch sheet of paper and hand the sheets to various actors to hold up for the audience as you briefly describe the commentaries that go with them.

That will accomplish three things: First it will make you appear really well prepared and smart—and, let’s face it, when was the last time someone accused you of being that? Second it will keep the audience involved and offer them a visual image highlighting what you are talking about, thereby increasing the MLP (maximum learning potential) of all those within a 3-mile radius of where you stand. Finally it will provide the entire group with the ideal opportunity to make helpful mental notes that they can refer back to when they go exploring in act 3.



Act 3 brings the audience back to life—theirs! Its purpose is to help them relate the Scripture story and its themes to their lives today. That will enable them to appropriate the meaning of the Scripture story so that they can discover, as Dr. Frankenstein did after creating his monster, that “it’s alive!” For that to happen, the director must help the young people make sense of the powerful story that is unfolding before them. Act 3 provides two phases, or scenes, that you can use to achieve that goal.

The first scene, called “Reflection and Discussion,” usually involves a breakup or two, or three. That is, the large group breaks up into pairs or, most often, small groups of four to six people. This small-group dynamic is designed to offer everyone an opportunity to actively explore and discuss what they have heard and experienced, in order to reflect on what it means for their lives and the world today.

The second scene, or phase, to act 3 is the “Curtain Call.” This is when the entire group gathers back together to share their thoughts and ideas about the three acts and the themes that were touched on and what the Scripture passage may be asking of young people today. Each curtain call ends with a moment of reflection and prayer. During this time, it might be a good idea to play some reflective music or a popular song that speaks to the themes covered in the session. Not only can reflective music help the young people to focus internally on what God may be asking of them, but it could help you to justify purchasing that new CD player you’ve been eyeing.

A General Warning

The Scripture General has warned that Ready-to-Go products may be harmful to your mental health. Please do not use this book while operating heavy machinery or if you lack a sense of humor. Consistent users are strongly encouraged to take frequent breaks from these skits in order to discover the other half of the secret of life. If you find yourself constantly thinking of new and tricky ways you can use these skits at staff luncheons or at the family dinner table, then please seek professional help immediately—in the form of an acting career.

Here are some other reminders and warnings that you might find helpful as you sink deeper and deeper into the delightfully dangerous world of *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits—The Sequel*:

There are three acts for a reason. It might be tempting to enjoy the laughter of a Scripture skit and then pull the curtain closed after act 1. Don't give in to that temptation (Jesus didn't!). The Scripture skits are means to an end, and laughs are not that end. The process is designed to spiral inward, so that each act takes the learner to a deeper, more meaningful level. Most sessions, if all three acts are done, will take 60 to 75 minutes to complete, depending on group size. If you must cut out a section owing to time constraints, cut out the activity portion of act 3 and go immediately to the curtain call. You can also change or skip some of the curtain call questions to suit your group, but please be faithful to concluding each session in prayer and sharing.

Stop and smell the roses. Which is simply an elegant way of saying, "Take . . . your . . . time . . . ," while reading the skit in act 1. Be sure to pause for the action (and laughs) to unfold, so that you can reach that coveted FLP (full laugh potential). The best way to do that is to read the skit to yourself out loud (and out of earshot of curious neighbors) *before* using it with a live, and potentially unpredictable, audience. That will give you time to get a feel for the action movements and where and when the really funny parts occur. It will also give you time and space to see if any quick script changes need to be made owing to your group's age or size, whether members have taken a bath lately, what they've eaten right before the skit, or other special concerns.

Don't forget to KISS. That's right, KISS (keep it short, silly). This is especially true when you are in the middle of act 2, examining the meaning of the Scripture reading. Make your mantra the same as that of the casting director for the Munchkins in *The Wizard of Oz*: "The shorter, the better." Trust that the participants will get the point if you keep that point short and sharp.

It's the action, not the actor. The ham. Every group has at least one, and you'll find out who they are in your group soon after you start using these Scripture skits. Hams love to hog the stage—but offering them opportunities to do so is not the purpose of *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits*. The point is not to see who can become the best actor, but to engage as many people as possible in telling and understanding the Scriptures. This means that the hams in your group should not be selected for the leading roles every time, even though they are the ones who will arrive early . . . with gifts of chocolate . . . when they sense a Scripture skit coming on. To avoid favoritism and give everyone an equal chance to be onstage, you may want to put every person's name into a box, then call out a Scripture skit role and randomly pull a name from the box.

Forget the gender. Unfortunately women are not represented as frequently as men in many of the Scripture stories, so there are more roles for men. In the words of my eight-year-old daughter, "IT ISN'T FAIR!" And frankly, she's right, so ignore the gender. If Shakespeare could have his male actors play female characters, then, by golly, why can't the director of these skits have female actors play male roles? Don't worry if a woman is chosen to play the man born blind or a guy is cast as Moses's sister, Miriam. Some of the best laughs might just occur when the gender roles are purposely switched or drawn at random.

Learn to just say no. No is not a word that we like to use, but it's better if we begin to face the hard truth now: No, we can't act up every moment of every day. Your young people are going to love doing Scripture skits, and you'll become addicted to their screams and cheers to learn more about the Scriptures. At some point, however, you are going to have to convey to the young people that there is more to life than acts 1, 2, and 3. When you reach that point, tell them it's time to stop acting up and start playing (and then introduce them to *Ready-to-Go Game Shows!*).

Create your own. Once you have the gist of all this, why not get really creative and assign some other Scripture stories to small groups and lead them in creating their own Ready-to-Go Scripture skits? While some small groups are writing the scripts, have others use Bible commentaries to look up and summarize the important points of the Scripture story, creating a few questions that will invite the whole group to reflect on how the story applies to their lives. Then take turns presenting the skits to the large group over the course of several weeks. Not only will your young people learn 3 trillion percent more this way, you may just inspire someone to become the Cecil B. DeMille of the twenty-first century!

Consider the Possibilities

There are ten sessions in *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits—The Sequel*, each highlighting a different Scripture story and focusing on one or more themes that you can connect with young people's lives today. Besides using these Scripture skits as sessions unto themselves, think about using them in one or more of the following settings:

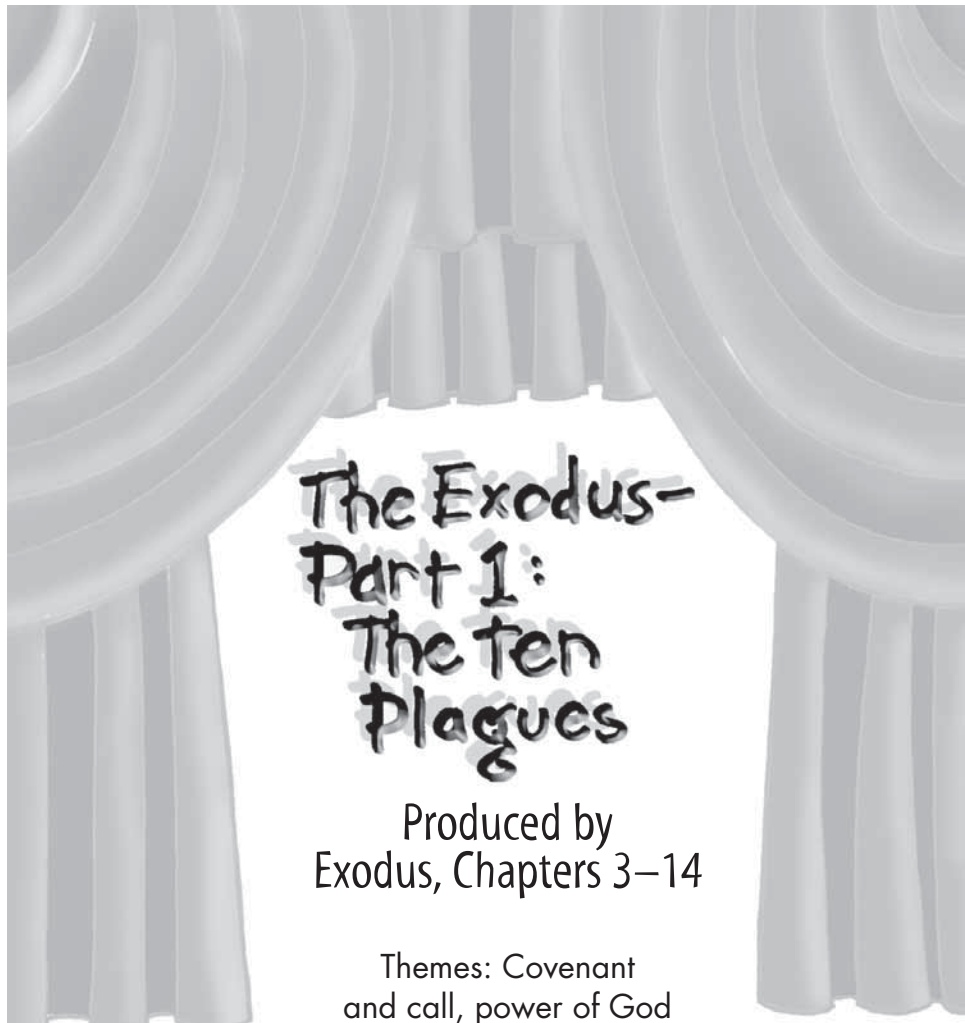
Retreats and lock-ins. What's a retreat without an opportunity to act out? Use *Ready-to-Go Scripture Skits—The Sequel* as a creative way to spice up your next retreat or lock-in, and as a strategy for introducing a talk or activity on a theme such as forgiveness, the power of God, or Gospel justice.

Prayer services. If you want to really pray the message of the reading, use acts 1 and 2 of a Scripture skit to get the group's attention and focus it on the meaning of the Scripture passage. That way, you've got the reading and the sermon all rolled up in a user-friendly experience that will focus the young people powerfully and attentively on prayer.

Parent-teen events. Want to get put on your teens' electronic buddy lists? Then make their parents star in a Ready-to-Go Scripture skit! These serve as terrific generation breakers, allowing youth and adults alike to laugh and learn at the same time. There's nothing that breaks down those generational walls quicker than giving teens the chance to watch a parent impersonate Zacchaeus as a Munchkin or to be asked to play one of

the dancing vineyard workers in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.

Catechist and volunteer training. The best way to show those who teach our young people another way to teach is to, well . . . *show them!* Why not begin your next training session or youth advisory board meeting with one of these skits, and give your youth ministry leaders a firsthand experience of how learning is not only fun but an outrageous act of faith!



Synopsis

This Scripture story examines the developing relationship between Moses and Yahweh, so that the audience may begin to see how God is made visible and present in their lives, and to discover how God is calling each of them into a relationship.



Props

- a staff (This could be any stick, broom, or mop that is handy.)

Cast (4 people plus the entire audience)

- voice of God (spoken loudly through cupped hands as if shouting from far away)
- Moses (must know the tune to “Pharaoh, Pharaoh” a.k.a.: “Louie, Louie”)
- Aaron (speaks like Bugs Bunny), holds the staff
- Pharaoh (speaks like Elmer Fudd)
- the audience



If this is the first skit the group has done . . .

Explain that the characters selected are to do *exactly* what they hear the director read and are to be sure to face the audience during the performance. You should pause at each ellipsis (. . .) to give the characters time to do what you just read. When you come across a cue card, hold the book in front of the character who must read it, and point to the box containing the lines while emphasizing the voice in which it is to be read. Take your time and let the laughs roll!

During the skit, the audience will be instructed to do various things, which they should do when they hear it announced in the script. Give the staff to Aaron to hold before beginning the skit.

Skit

One day Moses was sitting down warming his bare feet . . . by the fire of a burning bush . . . when he heard a loud voice say: . . .



Cue: Voice of God
[Speak loudly and slowly; cup your hands around your mouth.]

Moses, you need to wash your feet! . . .
And while you are at it, I'd like you to tell Pharaoh
to let my people go free.
And if you have any trouble, just use the staff I'll send you.
Shalom,
Yahweh.

Moses jumped up really excited . . . —higher— . . . because he had never been given a whole staff before. As he waited impatiently for his first applicant to show up, . . . his brother Aaron ran into him, . . . knocking both of them down. . . . Aaron helped Moses up and said in a voice similar to Bugs Bunny's: . . .



Cue: Aaron
[Speak like Bugs Bunny.]

Ummm, what's up, Moses?
Lookie here what I just found, a really neat staff!
And there's a small stone tablet attached that says,
 "Just stop, drop, and watch.
 Warranty expires after twelve uses.
 Shalom,
 Yahweh"
Hey, let's see what it can do. . . .

Aaron tossed the staff onto the ground, and it turned into a giant python that began to wrap itself around Moses, squeezing really tight, . . . causing his tongue to stick out and his eyes to grow big and wide. . . . Moses managed to gasp out these words in a squeaky voice: . . .



Cue: Moses
[Gasping for air]

Pretty . . . nice . . . staff, . . . Aaron. . . . Now . . .
if . . . you . . . could . . . call . . . it . . . off . . .
me, . . . I . . . think . . . we . . . need . . . to . . .
go . . . see . . . a . . . pharaoh . . . about . . .
some . . . frogs. . . .

The python turned back into the staff. Moses and Aaron picked it up and skipped over to the great Pharaoh, . . . who was drinking a glass of Nile water while squeezing the last bit of blood from a turnip. . . . Moses pointed the staff at Pharaoh and sang a message to him that went to the tune of "Louie, Louie": . . .



Cue: Moses
[Sing this to the tune of "Louie, Louie."]

Pharaoh, Pharaoh
Ohhh baby, let my people go.
Ugh!

Suddenly, Pharaoh's glass of water turned into blood, which got Pharaoh all choked up. . . . Remembering that he had both a hard heart and a hard head, Pharaoh stared back at Moses and Aaron, . . . cross-eyed, . . . and with defiance he said in his best Elmer Fudd voice: . . .



Cue: Pharaoh
[Speak like Elmer Fudd.]

Why you wascally Hebwew you,
You'll never twick me into wetting your people go
I need them to finish building an eweventh bedroom
at my Summa home in Caiwo.

Moses looked baffled . . . because he couldn't understand a word Pharaoh had said. But Moses knew he was going to have to play hardball with him. Pharaoh, thinking the same thing, stepped into a pitcher's stance . . . then wound up . . . counterclockwise . . . three times . . . and, in slow motion, . . . threw a changeup to Moses, who slowly swung the staff. . . . As soon as Moses finished his swing, . . . the audience turned into frogs, . . . hopping up and down and making weird croaking sounds . . . and searching for bugs with their tongues. . . .

After the crowd settled down, . . . Pharaoh pitched two fastballs . . . at the same time, . . . with both hands. . . . But Moses was ready and hit both with his staff, . . . which made the right side of the audience fly around like gnats . . . and the left side like flies, . . . with both sides making irritating buzzing sounds in each other's ears. . . .

Pharaoh's next pitch was a curveball, . . . causing Moses to spin around with the staff before hitting it to the right side of the audience, . . . making the females on that side turn into mooing cows . . . and the males into neighing horses. . . . But the ball continued to curve to the left side of the audience, turning them into a repulsive and grotesque disease, . . . which swarmed around the cows and horses, . . . breathing in their faces . . . and causing them to slump over and die, frozen in really weird postures . . . —weirder than that even. . . .

The ball continued to curve around the room, hitting Pharaoh on the side of the head, . . . —the other side— . . . causing him to itch uncontrollably, . . . with ugly festering boils all over his neck, . . . his armpits, . . . his kneecaps, . . . and his rear end, . . . which caused the audience to become grossed out . . . and made Moses sing out his tune again: . . .



Cue: Moses
[Sing this to the tune of "Louie, Louie."]

Pharaoh, Pharaoh
Ohhh baby, let my people go.
Ugh!

Pharaoh was getting really agitated . . . and began jumping up and down, screaming bad things in Egyptian. . . . Moses tossed the staff to Aaron, . . . who pointed it at the left side of the audience, causing them to stomp their feet so loud it sounded like thunder. . . . Then he pointed it at the right side, . . . causing them to slap their laps so fast it sounded like hail falling down. . . . The noise got louder . . . and louder, . . . until Aaron called for a rain delay by waving the staff back and forth, . . . bringing about complete silence . . . for three days. . . .

Just when Pharaoh thought the game was over, Moses tossed a ball to Aaron, who smacked it with the staff, turning everyone into wild and crazy locusts, . . . hopping and buzzing all around the room . . . and messing up people's hair. . . . Then Moses and Aaron led everyone in singing to Pharaoh one more time: . . .