

God's People in Egypt

February 4, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Exodus 1:8-17; 3:1-15

Session Outline

1. The Suffering of God's People (Exodus 1:8-17)
2. The Mediator of God's People (Exodus 3:1-6)
3. The Deliverance of God's People (Exodus 3:7-15)

Theological Theme

God had a plan to rescue His people from their slavery, which included sending Moses to lead them to the promised land. We have also been enslaved to sin and need a Savior, so God sent Jesus to rescue and deliver us.

Call to Action

We are all born enslaved to sin, and God has provided a Savior: Jesus. Have you placed your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior? Think about doing a traditional altar call this Sunday.



Leader Guide

God's People in Egypt

Introduction

The Jewish nation has had enemies and a lack of peace dating back to Biblical times and continuing to current day. After fleeing to Egypt to preserve their family at the end of the book of Genesis, Joseph's father and brothers settled down and flourished in that land.

They became such a strong group that the Egyptians no longer saw them as allies or as the family of Joseph who had saved the entire nation. The Israelites who had multiplied and thrived were suddenly faced with a new enemy who plotted evil against them. When evil attacks, God's people can cry out to Him, knowing He hears and cares.

- ❓ There was a shift over the time recorded between the end of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus. Why did the Egyptians begin to view the Israelites as a threat? What are other examples of this type of tension rising between groups in the world?
- ❓ When evil happens, how does it encourage you to know God sees and cares?

Session Summary

A closer look at the situation of the children of Israel in Egypt reveals truths about the Lord that still apply today. God sees the condition of His people, and He cares deeply about our suffering. We can cry out to God and pour out our hearts to Him because He doesn't just care, He has plans to deliver us.

God chose to use Moses to rescue the Israelites, and He continues to use people as instruments to accomplish His plans. We need rescue, so God sent Jesus to deliver us from our sins. Now, He invites us to be part of the miraculous, like Moses was when God called Him. God doesn't need us to save the world, but He allows us to join in His kingdom work.

1. The Suffering of God's People (Exodus 1:8-17)

After Joseph was sold into slavery, God used him to provide for the world during a famine that he predicted in Pharaoh's dream. Because of the famine, the rest of Joseph's family also migrated to Egypt (Genesis 37-50). The twelve sons of Israel, who became the twelve tribes of Israel, settled and thrived in the foreign land of Egypt. Years passed and leaders changed until no one was still around who remembered what Joseph had done to protect and save the land of Egypt. Instead of looking with favor on the Israelites, the new king over Egypt looked at the growing number of foreigners and felt threatened.

A plan was developed to enslave and keep the Israelites in line and avoid the possibility of their siding with any enemy of the Egyptians. The idea was that if the Egyptians could keep the Israelites subdued and submissive, they could control them and prevent any chance of an uprising or coup.



Why do you think Pharaoh was so threatened by the Israelites? Why do we often feel threatened by outsiders today?

Prejudice and fear of what might happen worked together as motivation for Pharaoh. He didn't just want to subdue the Israelites, He decided to make them so miserable that all they could do was focus on existing or surviving. This continued long enough that it became their way of life for generations.

Scripture tells us that even through slavery, the children of Israel multiplied and grew. The more they were afflicted, the more they grew. No affliction or persecution organized by man could prevent God's plan for His people from moving forward. The purpose of the Lord will always prevail, even if circumstances appear dire.




When was a time your circumstances seemed dire, but God was still working in your life?

When they saw the plan was not entirely effective, the king of Egypt took his persecution to another level. The midwives who helped deliver Hebrew babies were instructed to kill any males at birth. This plan reminds us of the heinous plans of Nazi Germany that also aimed to annihilate the Jewish people. If no males were allowed to live, then the population would soon die off because there was no intermarrying between the Egyptians and Hebrews. Again, the Lord had other plans and the midwives had a greater fear of the Lord than of the Egyptian leaders. God used these ordinary but faithful women to carry out His purposes.

The Israelite People


Verse 9 is the first time the Israelite people are called a "people." They came to Egypt as an extended family, but now Pharaoh compared their numbers with his own. This exaggeration indicates Pharaoh's eagerness to convince his courtiers that they must take decisive action.

-  Application: What is a decision you are faced with where you must choose between honoring God or obeying man? What makes these decisions difficult?

2. The Mediator of God's People (Exodus 3:1-6)

Because the midwives feared and respected God more than man, a Jewish baby named Moses was spared and raised in the palace of Pharaoh as chapter 2 describes in detail. Because of his own actions, Moses ended up tending his father-in-law's sheep in the desert, far removed from palace life. After forty years of living in obscurity, Moses suddenly found himself in the spotlight of the Lord's plans.

As He often does, God showed up in an ordinary moment of Moses's life. It was a routine day in the back side of the desert and suddenly everything changed. Many people think they are too average to be used by God for something special. Moses is a great reminder that God can and does use very ordinary people from very ordinary places to do powerful and miraculous things when they make themselves available.

-  How do you make yourself available to be used by the Lord on a regular basis?

As he was tending his sheep, Moses saw something strange and turned aside to investigate. He made himself available. God called for Moses's attention, and he responded appropriately, pausing what he was doing to check it out. He could have been so focused on his task that he refused to stop and see what was happening and might have missed out on what God wanted to do through him. God invites His people to get in on what He is doing, but we must decide to respond in obedience or not.

-  How has the Lord invited you to join in on what He is doing?

God called Moses by name. For a man who had been separated from his homeland and tending sheep in the desert for forty years, this might have been a shock. But God sees us and knows us by name no matter where we are or how long we have been there.

Using Moses's name twice indicated urgency and importance of what was to follow. God told Moses to stay back and take off his sandals because he was now standing on holy ground. The stretch of the desert was not holy because of where it was but because of who was there. The presence of God makes any place holy, and we should show proper respect for that. Removing sandals is a sign of humility that reminds us God deserves our honor. Once God identified Himself, Moses was in awe and revered God's holiness by hiding his face. Moses's response revealed humility and recognition of his own sinfulness.



Application: How do you respond when you recognize God is speaking to you or your community? In what sense is this always true?

3. The Deliverance of God's People (Exodus 3:7-15)

God explained His plan of deliverance to Moses, His chosen leader. The Israelites had cried out to the Lord in their distress, and God had heard their cries and cared about them. To fulfill a promise made to the patriarchs several hundred years earlier, God made it clear that this was the time for His people to take possession of Canaan.

As the plan unfolded, Moses got a picture of the role he was to play in this deliverance, and he reacted much like many are prone to when God calls them to step up and trust Him. When God revealed that he was going to send Moses to Pharaoh to tell him to release the Israelites, Moses had questions. But God did not have to use Moses to deliver His people—God can bring about anything that He chooses. However, the Lord often chooses to involve people so that we can join His work on earth.



Why do you think God uses humans to bring about His plans instead of just doing it all on His own? How have you seen God use ordinary people to fulfill His plans?

Moses's immediate response was to question his own worthiness to be part of God's plan. He asked the same thing we often do. Who am I to be used by you Lord? An encouraging thing to remember is how God responded. Instead of praising Moses or trying to build him up, God told Moses more about who He is. When God calls a person to step out in faith, it is not about the person as much as it is about God. God was the One who was going to make this happen and Moses was just an instrument.



Why is it empowering to focus more on who God is than on our own abilities?

As Moses wrestled with his doubts and continued to make excuses about why he was not the right man for the job, God continued to reveal things about Himself and who He is. When pressed about who to say sent him, God responded, "I AM WHO I AM." This name stresses that God has no equal and is always the same.

Moses could only fulfill his purpose in God's plan by looking outside himself and placing his faith and trust in the Lord. All of us experience defining moments. We don't always know when they will arrive, but when they do, we can choose to pay attention and engage with the Lord—just like Moses did. That day, Moses made the right choice and became part of the miraculous plan of God that changed the world.

- Application: How is God calling you to step out in faith and trust Him right now?

Conclusion

God is always aware of what is happening, and He cares deeply about His people. The children of Israel had been flourishing in Egypt until Pharaoh enslaved them, seeking to keep them in line. He made their lives miserable, and they cried out to the Lord for deliverance. All people have been enslaved by sin and evil and our best recourse is to cry out to the Lord as the Israelites did.

To deliver the children of Israel, God spoke to Moses from a burning bush and set a plan in motion that changed everything. The fact that the Lord chooses to use people to accomplish His plans is still true today, and we can learn from God's interaction with Moses how to respond when we get invited into God's plans.

Moses was honest with God about his questions and understood the reality that he was not powerful enough to bring freedom to the Israelites on his own. God redirected Moses's attention to who God is instead of relying on his own strength. Anytime we step out in obedience to the Lord, we can confidently trust that, when it is God's plan, the weight of success is not on us but on the Lord.

- How have you experienced the enslaving power of sin?
- How is it comforting to know God is aware of all things and He cares about you?
- Where do you need to trust in the power of the Lord instead of your own strength? How can this group support one another in that?

Prayer of Response

Praise the Lord for His care over you and His plan to save you from your sin by sending Jesus to the world. Ask for courage to step out in faith when God invites you to be part of His plans.

Memory Verse

God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM., This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." - Exodus 3:14

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Exodus* by Tony Merida
- *Be Delivered* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Exodus* by Philip Graham Ryken

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Exodus

Purpose

The book of Exodus shows God at work with the goal of having such close fellowship with people that he is described as dwelling among them. He rescued the Israelites in order to make himself known, not only by the exercise of his power but also through an ongoing covenant relationship based on his capacity for patience, grace, and forgiveness. The record of what the Lord did for the Israelites provided grounds for them to recognize him as their God who deserved their complete loyalty and obedience. This record would make clear to the Israelites their identity as God's people and would continue the display of his glorious identity.

Author

The book of Exodus does not state who its author was. It does refer to occasions when Moses made a written record of events that took place and what God had said (17:14; 24:4, 7; 34:27–28). The book also contains references to preserving and passing on information. Along with the other four books of the Pentateuch, it has long been considered to be primarily the work of Moses. Moses could have written Exodus at any time during a forty-year time span: after the Israelites finished constructing and dedicating the tabernacle at Mount Sinai, at the start of their second year after leaving Egypt (1445 BC), and before his death in the land of Moab (about 1406 BC).

Setting

Exodus picks up where the Genesis narrative ended with the death of Joseph around 1805 BC. It quickly moves us forward almost three hundred years to a time in Egypt when the circumstances of Jacob's descendants had changed. The Israelites were serving as slaves during Egypt's Eighteenth Dynasty, probably under the pharaohs Thutmose and Amenhotep II. The Hebrew slaves experienced a miraculous deliverance by God's hand through his servant-leader Moses. The Israelite slavery ended in 1446 BC. The book of Exodus records the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt and the Israelites' first year in the wilderness, including the giving of the law.

Special Features

The title "Exodus" is an anglicized version of a Greek word that means "departure" in recognition of one of the book's major events—the departure of God's people from Egypt. Exodus could be considered the central book in the Old Testament because it records God's act of saving the Israelites and establishing them as a covenant community, a nation chosen to serve and represent him. Exodus describes the enslavement and oppression of the Israelites; the preparation and call of Moses; the conflict between Yahweh the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt (represented by Pharaoh); the exodus of the Israelites; their establishment as a nation in covenant with the Lord; their rebellion; and the Lord's provision for their ongoing relationship, symbolized by his presence at the tabernacle they built for him.

Extended Commentary

Exodus 1-3

With Oppressed People (1:1–22). The Exodus story begins by recalling the Genesis account of the descent of Jacob and his sons to Egypt and their sojourn there until after Joseph’s death (Gen. 46–50). The Genesis link reminds readers that God sent Israel into Egypt to deliver them from famine. Their prosperity and success in their new land show that Israel was the recipient of God’s blessings on creation and to Abraham.

Egyptian hospitality did not long outlive Joseph, however, and within a generation or two before Moses’ birth had changed to bitter hostility and oppression. Israel was put under forced labor and eventually subjected to the slaughter of their male newborns. Even in the years of oppression God was with Israel and caused them to prosper. The Lord had revealed to Abraham that his offspring would suffer oppression but that their bondage would be lifted by a great redemptive act. The Egyptians would be judged and the slave people set free to return to their own land (Gen. 15:13–16). Israel’s experience of slavery was not a disaster that proved its God to be irrelevant; it was but part of the redemptive plan of the Lord of history. In contrast to the Lord of history stand the pharaohs who came and went (see 2:23) and trembled with fear.

With Young Moses (2:1–22). God’s saving presence is clear in the early life of Moses, the human agent of God’s deliverance. Moses’ Levite parents saved him from a cruel death by hiding him in a basket in the Nile. Rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses was reared by his mother, who introduced him to the God of Israel. Though Moses later enjoyed the privileges of the Egyptian royal court, he never forgot his Israelite heritage. When he saw a fellow Hebrew being abused, he came to his rescue, slaying the offending Egyptian official in the process. This rash, though heroic, act forced Moses into exile in Midian. There Moses came to the rescue of the daughters of Reuel (Jethro), a Midianite priest. Moses married Zipporah, one of the shepherd daughters.

Revelation to Moses (2:23–4:17). The death of the former king of Egypt paved the way for Moses to return to lead his people to freedom. But first the ever-living God had to reveal Himself to Moses in a convincing display of His power and purposes. God did this at Mount Horeb (Sinai) in the burning bush that was not consumed. In this marvelous appearance the Lord identified Himself as the God of the ancestors of Israel, the One who was aware of His people’s suffering and was coming now to fulfill His pledge of deliverance and land. Though he knew of the God of his fathers and of the ancient covenant promises, Moses needed to know precisely how his God would identify Himself to His people. The answer was as Yahweh, the “I AM,” who by that name would redeem them and live among them. (See the feature article “Names of God.”)

Moses felt inadequate for the task God gave him. What was crucial was not Moses’ “Who am I?” but God’s “I will be with you.” Moses doubted that the people would accept his leadership or believe his report about the burning bush experience. Therefore Yahweh gave Moses some tangible evidence of His presence and blessing, turning Moses’ shepherd’s staff into a serpent and causing his hand to become leprous. Still not confident of success, Moses argued that he was not articulate. To still his objections once more, Yahweh promised to make his brother Aaron his spokesman. Indeed, God had already sent Aaron on his way.¹

References

1. Eugene H. Merrill, “The Pentateuch,” in *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 29–30.