

The Rescue Plan
Exodus
Small Group Guide

Opening Question: As we approach the fall/winter holidays, which of the holiday meals or customs do you most anticipate? Why does it hold such meaning for you?

BACKGROUND READING/INTRO: Today we're looking at the most famous rescue story ever – The Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt by God's Power¹. Let's quickly summarize our journey through The Big Story of the Bible to this point: God created everything, and human beings were the pinnacle of his creation. All was "very good"; God said there was only one thing they couldn't do and through Satan's temptation, Adam and Eve did it. They had a broken relationship with God, the effects of which spilled out into all of creation. But God promised that he would fix it (Genesis 3:15). Humankind got progressively worse until God had to institute The Flood, wiping out all except Noah and family.

Finally we see the beginning of God's rescue plan: God promises Abraham he will save all humankind via Abraham's family, even foreshadowing the coming of a Savior. But first God tested Abraham's faith with the sacrifice of Isaac. We later saw how God worked transformation in Jacob (Isaac's son, "the Deceiver"). God then again foreshadowed a suffering Savior in the life of Joseph (Jacob's son). Though sold as a slave, he eventually rose to become the #2 person in Egypt, the most powerful country in the world, and rescued his family via his plan to prepare for a world-wide famine.

Outline: 1) Beginnings: a) Creation, b) Fall, c) Flood, d) Tower of Babel (skipped); 2) Promises: a) Abraham, b) Isaac, c) Jacob, d) Joseph.

Read Exodus 3:1-15 and 5:1-2.

1. After Joseph's death, Egyptian rulers (pharaohs) soon forgot about him and cruelly enslaved the Israelites. This went on for about 400 years! God saw their misery and called Moses to lead His people out of Egypt. He warned Moses that Pharaoh will not listen, God will further harden his heart, and thus will resist Moses' demand for Israel's freedom. However, in the end, God will work in such a powerful way (10 plagues) that Pharaoh will be forced to set them free. Discuss the following.
 - a. Why is 3:e7 potentially life-altering? What does it say that God notices and hears the cries of his people?
 - b. What is the significance of God telling Moses to tell the Israelites that *Yahweh* ("I am") has sent him?

¹ Dating in the Old Testament has more precision starting with the beginning of King David's reign in 1010 BC. Working backwards, scholars have two main theories of the Exodus date, either around 1450 or 1250 B.C. And, as was mentioned in a prior study guide, the period from Abraham to Joseph can be roughly dated either 2075-1800 or 1875-1600 BC. The older date is derived from 1 Kings 6:1, "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel [966 BC], in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD." The more recent date is due to some cultural and archeological problems with the earlier date, though not conclusive. Since it was a common Hebrew (Israelite) practice to "telescope" generations, meaning to skip unimportant descendants when recounting a family line, dates are uncertain before the time of Abraham.

- c. Pharaoh's mocking question in 5:2 is important, for God's supernatural display of power in the following chapters is in response to this question. How do these displays answer the question, "Who is the LORD? (Yahweh)"
- d. We see interesting dynamics in Pharaoh's hardness of heart and how God speaks about this hardness of heart. Did you ever consider that God not only has power or sovereignty over the laws of nature (via the 10 plagues), but also over human hearts? Discuss.
- e. Does it scare you or affect you that God might further harden one's heart when a person repeatedly gives in to sin?

TAKE TURNS READING Exodus 12:1-42 (It is long!)

2. To avoid the plague of the firstborn, the Israelites were to slaughter a perfect lamb and spread its blood over their doorposts. Thus, the angel of death would "pass over" their houses.
 - a. Why do you think that God used such a graphic, bloody act as part of his deliverance of his people?
 - b. If the Israelites did not put blood on their doorposts, would it be fair for the angel of death to kill their firstborn? Why?
 - c. Imagine that you are a Jewish child, living sometime in the centuries following these events (but before the birth of Christ). Why would the Passover celebration have such significance for you and your family? Why do you think that God commanded his people to commemorate these events annually?
 - d. In the Gospels, we see that Jesus was ultimately the "Passover Lamb" to whom all of these events had pointed. If this is true, how would you understand the various components of the original Passover event as applied to us, in light of Jesus? For example: From what do we need deliverance? What is the blood of the lamb on our doorposts?
 - e. The Jews were commanded to and did celebrate Passover after this event. How can we better celebrate Jesus as our Passover lamb/Rescuer both literally and metaphorically? Discuss.
3. Some of you today may feel like a slave. You can never catch a break. How can we pray for and support you?
4. Prayer: Spend time sharing about how God is working in you, and where you need support. Pray for one another. Also spend some time praying for our country in view of the upcoming elections.