

SESSION 4 ASSIGNMENT

Theme Word: Deliverance

Title: God Hears the Cry

Theme Verse:

“I’ve clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I’ve heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. I’ve come down to rescue them from the Egyptians.”
(Exodus 3:7-8)

Daily Psalm:

“Hear my words, LORD!
Consider my groans!
Pay attention to the sound of my cries, my king and my God,
because I am praying to you!
Lord, in the morning you hear my voice.
In the morning I lay it all out before you.
Then I wait expectantly.”
(Psalm 5:1-3)

Mark of Discipleship

Disciples hear and respond by receiving and becoming bearers of God’s message of deliverance.

Our Human Condition

Human beings who are humiliated, exploited, or enslaved cry out for deliverance. They wait for a deliverer. They plead, “Does anybody care?”

Group Discussion Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Please respond to the following instruction in the space provided. Return to this discussion thread often to read others’ responses.

Note that the plural form (“human beings”) is used this week in Our Human Condition because it is reflective of the weekly Scripture. As you consider the Human Condition, write a list of groups in our world today who you feel are humiliated, exploited, or enslaved, and waiting for deliverance.

DAY 1

Review Video [Option to watch video or read transcript]

Introduction to This Session

As you read the Bible narrative about Moses, it is helpful to know the story comes from four different sources and thus interweaves four traditions (or strands of writings). Therefore, names for people and places and for God, as well as accounts of particular events, may vary depending on which oral or written tradition they came from. For example, Reuel is the same person as Jethro; Horeb is the same place as Sinai. Two traditions use a different word for the deity. One group of Hebrew writers used “Elohim” (God), and another used “Yahweh” (Lord). The distinction is blurred by the English translation.

Exodus 1–4 (the oppression of the Hebrews and the call of Moses) [Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

Four hundred thirty years have passed since Joseph stored grain for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The descendants of Jacob’s twelve sons have prospered on the good land called Goshen on the Nile Delta in northeastern Egypt. They also have become, as God had promised Abraham, “as many as ... the grains of sand on the seashore” (Genesis 22:17). By the time of Moses, they numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Though still called Hebrews, they also were taking on a new name: Israelites, the children of Israel (Jacob). As a nation of displaced people, they would also become known corporately as Israel—a name that would eventually be affixed to a country.

Trouble was brewing for this immigrant people: The politics of Egypt had taken a downward turn. “Now a new king came to power in Egypt who didn’t know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). The Israelites were seen as aliens who lived on the border and did not worship Egyptian gods. They were perceived as a threat because they were so numerous.

The powerful central government of the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt developed strong armies and constructed huge buildings. The Egyptian pharaohs Seti I and Rameses II built gigantic tombs and temples with mammoth statues. In the Nile Delta, they constructed the great storage cities of Pithom and Rameses. Israelite men, as well as Egyptian peasants, were forced into day labor. The work was hard, and the conditions oppressive. Slowly the kings turned the

economic screw tighter and tighter. The Israelites became slaves, but they were so numerous that those in power began to fear them. Human life was cheap.

Pharaoh, with a paranoid mentality, decided to kill the Hebrew baby boys. First, he appealed to the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, and when that ploy did not work, he demanded that the baby boys be thrown into the Nile. Wailing was heard in the streets. Daily life was reduced to subhuman existence. Freedom gradually slipped away. The Hebrews were intimidated, resigned, helpless. The promises God had made to Abraham seemed far away and long ago.

Then one woman resisted. Moses' mother, Jochebed, slipped her baby into the Nile as Pharaoh commanded, but in a tar-covered basket. Moses' sister, Miriam, watched from a distance. The princess, Pharaoh's daughter, drew the baby out, and at the suggestion of Miriam hired a Hebrew woman, not knowing the woman was Moses' mother, to nurse him. The princess adopted Moses as her own son.

The name "Moses" carries two meanings. It is similar to the Egyptian word for "child" or "son," a son for the princess. But the Hebrews understood "son" to stand for God's people. "Out of Egypt I called my son" (Hosea 11:1). "Moses" in Hebrew means "drawn forth." He was drawn forth from the water, but later he drew forth the people through the water.

The boy was nurtured on his mother's Hebrew faith, listening to the lullabies of his people. He was trained in the ways of the Egyptian king's court, educated by the finest scholars in the known world. Yet when God said to Moses, "What is that in your hand?" Moses saw only a staff that stood as a symbol of himself—a Hebrew slave raised as an Egyptian, a runaway murderer, a stammerer living in the desert as a shepherd. But God saw a different man—a compassionate man who had drunk in the stories of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel along with his mother's milk, and who had sharpened his mind on the mathematics and astronomy of the pyramids.

Moses had empathy for the oppressed. After witnessing an Egyptian beat a Hebrew, he killed the assailant (Exodus 2:11-12). He was offended when one Hebrew struck another (Exodus 2:13), and he was quick to drive away troublemakers from Jethro's daughters (Exodus 2:17).

When Moses took off his shoes and threw down his staff, he was ready to listen to God. First God revealed something about God's own nature. As our theme verse reminds us, God sees, hears, knows and comes down to deliver. God's people had not been forgotten. But now God also called Moses to participate in leading this deliverance.

At first Moses objected to the call. The impossibility of the task seemed clear to him. He said in effect, "Bring it to pass, Lord, but not through me."

"I Am Who I Am"

Moses needed to know who was summoning him. Like Jacob wrestling with God at the Jabbok River, Moses demanded to know: "Tell me your name." Usually, it was thought that to know

someone's name was to have power over that person. Hence, most pagan gods did not reveal their names. God's revelation was cloaked in mystery. God's name both revealed and hid. Learning God's name still kept Moses in awe and under authority. The name can be translated "I Am" or "I Am Who I Am" or "I Will Be What I Will Be." Tell the people, said God, that "I Am" has sent you. Not the fertility gods of the Nile or of the high places of Canaan, not the sun god of Egypt or the moon god of Mesopotamia, but the God of the Israelites—the same who created the stars and the seas, the same who breathed life into men and women, the one who inspired Moses' mother to place him in a basket and a compassionate woman to draw him from the water. I am "the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." God reminded Moses of the history and character of the God who was talking to him: "I Am" has sent you.

The call of Moses is central to Exodus.

Personal Reflection Questions [Answer in space provided on app]

Describe any times in your life when you have felt God speaking to or calling you.

Describe any sense of reluctance you have felt about responding when God called you to a difficult task.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

DAY 2

A Biblical Scholar's Perspective Video [Option to watch video or read transcript]

Reflections on A Biblical Scholar's Perspective [Respond in space provided on app]

Please note any comments or questions that come to mind after viewing the video.

Exodus 5–7 (Moses confronting Pharaoh, beginning of the plagues) [Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

Confronting Pharaoh

Moses asked Pharaoh's permission for the Israelites to make a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to God. Pharaoh rightly suspected the Israelites would never return, so he refused the request.

Moses and Aaron, struggling with Pharaoh, performed signs and wonders as persuasion, but Pharaoh's magicians countered. Then the struggle began in earnest. Faith wrestled with unfaith; freedom fought against bondage. Ten plagues occurred—plagues not unknown to Egypt but occurring with severity, rapidity, and preannounced by Moses: pollution of the Nile, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock disease, boils, thunderstorms with hail, locusts, thick darkness, and finally death of the firstborn. Until the last plague, Pharaoh refused to let the people go.

In Exodus 4:21, we read that God had warned Moses that Pharaoh would not listen, that God would "make him stubborn." What does this mean? It means that willful resistance to God's intentions makes a person calloused. God allows us to resist God's word. When we make that choice, it is the beginning of a heart closed to God. Pharaoh's heart became stubborn and hard.

Hundreds of years later the prophet Isaiah described the same frame of mind in the people of Israel:

"Make the minds of this people dull.
Make their ears deaf and their eyes blind,
so they can't see with their eyes,

or hear with their ears,
or understand with their minds,
and turn, and be healed.”
(Isaiah 6:10)

Jesus used this passage from Isaiah to describe the same condition in his time (Matthew 13:13-15; Mark 8:17-18). A resisting heart, as it continues to encounter the word of God, becomes even more resistant.

Group Discussion Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Please respond to the following question in the space provided. Return to this discussion thread often to read others’ responses.

Why do you think the Bible says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart (or “made him stubborn,” as the Common English Bible says)? Consider these verses:

Exodus 4:21: “The Lord said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt, make sure that you appear before Pharaoh and do all the amazing acts that I’ve given you the power to do. But I’ll make him stubborn so that he won’t let the people go.’”

Exodus 7:3-5: “But I’ll make Pharaoh stubborn, and I’ll perform many of my signs and amazing acts in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh refuses to listen to you, then I’ll act against Egypt and I’ll bring my people the Israelites out of the land of Egypt in military formation by momentous events of justice. The Egyptians will come to know that I am the Lord, when I act against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them.”

Exodus 10:1-2: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go to Pharaoh. I’ve made him and his officials stubborn so that I can show them my signs and so that you can tell your children and grandchildren how I overpowered the Egyptians with the signs I did among them. You will know that I am the Lord.’”

Group Discussion Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Please respond to the following question in the space provided. Return to this discussion thread often to read others’ responses.

The Bible also says Pharaoh hardened his own heart (or remained stubborn) (Exodus 7:22). What do you think happened? How and why do you think this happens to people? What do you think can keep a person from developing a “hardened heart,” being stubborn toward God or calloused?

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

DAY 3

Exodus 8–11 (remaining plagues) [Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

The first wonders of Moses and Aaron failed to impress the Egyptians. Their magicians could stiffen snakes, turn water blood red, and bring frogs out onto the land. But the plague of the gnats confounded them. “This is something only God could do!” they said (Exodus 8:19).

Their expression of shock was significant. This was not just a contest between Moses and Pharaoh’s magicians over who could do the best tricks. There is a cosmic background to all this: A pharaoh was considered a god himself and part of an entire pantheon of gods. But who really ruled creation and history? Moses spoke in the name of Israel’s God, Yahweh, whose people were enslaved and oppressed. The plagues made the claim that Yahweh ruled creation and would intervene on behalf of God’s people.

“Let my people go!” is not Moses speaking for himself, but Yahweh claiming sovereignty even over Pharaoh and all he symbolizes. As God told Moses, “The Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord” (Exodus 7:5”).

And still Pharaoh refused to let the people go.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

DAY 4

Exodus 12–14 (explanation of Passover, death of the firstborn, escape from Egypt)

[Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

Passover is often misunderstood. The Passover is not “passing over” the sea, as the Israelites soon would do as they exited. Rather, Passover is the plague of death “passing over” or “sparing” the homes of the Israelites because they had obeyed God and anointed their doorposts with the lamb’s sacrificial blood. (Imagine the forceful symbolism this event provides later for Christians!)

If you attend a Passover meal (Seder) with Jewish people today, you eat the unleavened bread (the Israelites had to leave in a hurry and had no time for bread to rise), roasted lamb (remembering anointing of blood to obtain release and the quick feast in hope of freedom), and the bitter herbs dipped in salt water (remembering the bitter oppression and the tears of slavery).

Freedom Costs

Bondage carries a cost, but so does freedom. Most people do not realize the price of justice and freedom. Great leaders, however, do.

Personal Reflection Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Write down names of leaders who have led their people to freedom at great cost.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.

DAY 5

Exodus 15–18 (song of Moses, experiences in the wilderness) [Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

People don't always react with joy when they are being delivered from bondage. Moses had great difficulty with the Israelites. They were often afraid, sometimes angry, and many times ready to abandon their dreams. When Moses and Aaron first proposed a three-day journey for a sacrificial feast, Pharaoh lashed back with his famous bricks-without-straw speech. The Israelite supervisors turned on Moses and Aaron, accusing them of making their slavery even more painful (Exodus 5:15-21).

Personal Reflection Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Recall a time when justice was needed, when power struck down hard, and people blamed their own leaders.

Psalms 105 (thanksgiving for God's faithfulness to the covenant) [Automatically linked to the in-app Bible]

Commentary

Fear of the unknown and anxiety about their future caused the Israelites to complain again and again. After the plagues, as they stood on the brink of freedom, they panicked. The sea was before them, the chariots behind them. They cried out, "Weren't there enough graves in Egypt that you took us away to die in the desert?" (Exodus 14:11). How human! Once again Moses spoke the word of faith: "Don't be afraid. Stand your ground, and watch the Lord rescue you today" (Exodus 14:13).

When they complained about food, God provided quail and then manna (Exodus 16:13-15). To this day, quail migrate across the Mediterranean Sea and drop exhausted in the desert. The manna was a flaky, sweet substance gathered early in the morning to be ground and made into bread. The people were to gather enough manna for one day, except on the sixth day. Then they were to gather enough to have some left over for the Sabbath (Exodus 16:22-26). Notice that the writer of Exodus constantly reinforces the importance of the Sabbath.

The message of Exodus is that God hears, God sees, God knows, God remembers, and God acts. That theme is chanted liturgically in Deuteronomy 6:21-25, 26:5-10, and Joshua 24:2-14, as well

as remembered by the prophets (Hosea 11:1-4). It states the salvation experience of the Israelites.

God's action in the Exodus has eternal and universal implications. When the social systems of humankind become oppressive, God hears the cry of the oppressed and acts.

God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants is still valid. God is faithful to the agreement. In the Exodus, God fulfills the promise of deliverance. That promise is to everyone who is "in Egypt," to everyone who is in bondage.

In the Passover Haggadah, a Jewish liturgy for Seder, it is written, "I am a Jew because in every place where suffering weeps, the Jew weeps. I am a Jew because every time when despair cries out, the Jew hopes."

In Romans, Chapter 11:17-19, the Scripture says, "If some of the branches were broken off, and you were a wild olive branch, and you were grafted in among the other branches and shared the root that produces the rich oil of the olive tree, then don't brag like you're better than the other branches. If you do brag, be careful: it's not you that sustains the root, but it's the root that sustains you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.'"

Personal Reflection Question [Answer in space provided on app]

Christians have been grafted into Abraham's people (Romans 11:17-19), and our roots are in the Israelite people. So, Exodus is our history, too. What is it about being Christian that causes us to weep with the suffering and hope with the despairing?

Preparation for Group Meeting

To be ready to participate in this session's group meeting:

- + Make sure you have completed all the readings, taken notes, answered the questions, and participated in the group discussion threads.
- + Complete the Mark of Discipleship section below.

Mark of Discipleship

First, revisit this session's **Human Condition**:

Human beings who are humiliated, exploited, or enslaved cry out for deliverance. They wait for a deliverer. They plead, "Does anybody care?"

Now consider this session's **Mark of Discipleship**, the Christian response to this Human Condition.

Disciples hear and respond by receiving and becoming bearers of God's message of deliverance.

Weaving its way through the Exodus story (and at times rising above the story itself) is the strong, assuring message that God is faithful to God's promise. God's covenant stands!

God hears the cries of those in bondage and calls them into freedom. The faithful disciple hears and responds by receiving and becoming a bearer of God's message of deliverance.

The Israelites were caught in an oppressive social system. They were trapped politically and economically. Think about people today who are caught in oppressive social systems.

Personal Reflection Questions [Answer in space provided on app]

How do such systems come into being? How can we change them?

Those who have been in bondage individually or as a people have a deliverance story to tell.

Tell a deliverance story that's personal or that you've learned about in the news.

People today experience bondage in many ways, such as abuse, neglect, oppression, and addiction. How can God use you as a messenger of deliverance in these circumstances?

Have you ever felt that you had too much power over other people? Or that other people had too much power over you? Describe the situation.

Response to Mark of Discipleship [Compose prayer in space provided on app]

In closing, compose a Personal Prayer in response to your learning. It can be anything you feel God has impressed upon your heart or mind. This can be a prayer of praise, of thankfulness, of desired change, of confession, of repentance, etc. You will always have an opportunity to make any updates to your Personal Prayer before we close our group meeting since you may have new thoughts as a result of our discussions. You will be asked to pray your Personal Prayer aloud when we close our group meeting.

For example, you might choose to pray for an oppressed people in the world and ask for God's guidance in determining at least one specific way in which you can become a bearer of God's message of deliverance to these people.

If You Want to Know More

See what you can discover about the building programs during the time of pharaohs Seti I and Rameses II.

Ending the Day's Assignment

Remember to end your study time in prayer.