

DISCOVERY 5

The Exodus

The symbol for The Exodus is a burning flame set against the pyramids. God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. (Exodus 3:2)

BACKGROUND FROM THE AUTHOR

It was a significant day in my life when I received my first Bible. It was a *Revised Standard Version* with a red cover and an inscription page bearing the autographs of my pastor, church school superintendent, and Sunday school teachers. As an eleven year old I was eager to read it but there was much that I did not understand, words beyond defining much less pronouncing, and concepts that I would only understand later with some maturity and life experience. But I do remember how exciting it was to open the Bible to Exodus and read the story of God's thrilling rescue of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt — the call of Moses, the plagues, and the dramatic manifestation of God on Mt. Sinai. It was only much later that I realized how appropriate it was that my entry point into the biblical story was exactly where that story began.

Where does the biblical story begin? Once again, a thought-provoking insight provided in *Understanding the Old Testament* helps guide our discovery:

...we cannot begin to understand the Old Testament if we regard it merely as great literature, interesting history, or the development of lofty ideas. The Old Testament presents the story of God's participation in the history of a particular people. To be sure, all human history is the sphere of God's sovereignty. But God became particularly involved in the career of a comparatively obscure people, thereby initiating a historical drama that has changed human perspectives and altered the course of human affairs.

When we seek to understand the meaning of our individual life stories, we do not actually begin with birth or infancy, even though a written autobiography might start there. Rather, we view or re-view our early childhood in the light of later experiences that are impressed deeply in memory. Analogously, Israel's life story did not begin with the time of Abraham or even the Creation, although the Old Testament in its present form starts there. Rather, Israel's history had its true beginning in a crucial historical experience that created a self-conscious historical community — an event so decisive that earlier happenings and subsequent experiences were seen in its light.

This decisive event — the great watershed of Israel's history — was the Exodus from Egypt. Even today the Jewish people understand their vocation and destiny in the light of this revealing event. Jews recall and make contemporary the Exodus as they celebrate the Passover. This act of worship is not just a form of archaism — a retreat from the present into the unrecoverable once-upon-a-time. Rather, observant Jews see themselves as participants in that experience. The event of the past enters into the present with deep meaning.⁵

One of the most important discoveries to be made in this course is found in this session. The starting place for Israel's understanding of God's mighty acts was the Exodus. Everything that had happened before the Exodus was understood in the light of what happened in that decisive event. Most scholars date the Exodus in the 11th or 13th century BCE and date the earliest writings in our Bible 200-300 years later. The stories about the earliest period in Israel's history were orally transmitted for centuries. When they were finally written down in the 10th or 11th century BCE, they were understood in relation to God's mighty act of deliverance in the Exodus. Affirming the centrality of the Exodus in the faith of Israel is crucial in making further discoveries.

SESSION PLANS

Summary and Learning Objectives

The purpose of this session is to introduce the participants to the people, places and stories of *The Exodus*.

This session is intended to enable the participants to:

⁵Ibid., 9.

- 1. Tell the story of *The Exodus* using their notes on the eight basic Scripture readings
- 2. Share with one another the questions and discoveries that arose during their study
- 3. Recall several of the names for God used in Genesis and Exodus
- 4. Comment on the importance of The Exodus for Israel's understanding of God
- 5. Describe their insights about God and the ways God delivers people from bondage

Resources You May Need

- **♦** Refreshments
- ♦ A computer (and a projector and screen, if available)
- ◆ The slide presentation on this CD-Rom for Discovery 5 in "The Old Testament 1-5"
- ♦ A chalkboard and chalk or newsprint, markers and masking tape
- ♦ Copies of the quotation from *Understanding the Old Testament*
- ◆ A large candle and a lighter
- Copies of the opening prayer
- ♦ A copy of the questions on page 59 of this Guide on a chalkboard or newsprint
- ♦ Copies of the responsive reading of Psalm 106: 1-12

Leadership Strategy

SETTING THE STAGE

- Project the quote from *Understanding the Old Testament* for the participants to read as they arrive or provide a printed copy for each participant.
- Project the title slide to signal that the session is starting.
- 1. Light the Christ Candle.

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. (Ephesians 5:8-9)

2. Project the prayer or provide printed copies of the following prayer and invite the group to pray together.

Liberating God, you parted the sea to deliver your people. The waters you have parted in our own lives have been more subtle, the deliverance from oppression often concealed, your sustenance along our journey less obvious. Yet we know that you continue to deliver your people. In Jesus Christ we have been set free! Increase our understanding, accept our thankfulness, and expand our joy. In our Savior's name. Amen.

3. At the end of the previous session, Joseph and his family were living comfortably in Egypt. In order to provide the bridge between the end of Genesis and the beginning of the passages the participants were asked to read in preparation for today's session, ask someone to read aloud Exodus 1:1-14. Be aware that the names of the sons of Jacob are difficult to pronounce. The reader may skip the names and simply paraphrase the first four verses and then read verses 5-14.

EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

- l. Tell the participants to turn to "The Search Begins" in their Resource Books. Ask for a volunteer to summarize the first passage.
 - **Exodus 3:1-20**, God Calls Moses

In "Focusing the Search" the participants were asked to discover several different names for God used in the Old Testament. Invite participants who have different Bible translations to share the information they have gathered on page 46 of the Resource Book.

Participants also were asked to use their creative energies to come up with a sketch, movie or television screenplay, first person account, or personal blog that would help them get a "feel" for one of the passages in the story of *The Exodus*. Exodus

3:1-6 was one of these passages. Ask those who have prepared something on this passage to share it now.

Some of the questions the participants brought to the session about this passage will be answered as the story is summarized by the group. However, if the participants still have specific questions about the passage after it is retold, you and others in the group can respond now. If you prefer, wait until all of the passages have been summarized before you invite the questions.

Continue with the summaries of the remaining passages. Other passages that may have been selected for creative work are Exodus 4:1-9; Exodus 12:37-42; Exodus 13:17-22; Exodus 14:15-31; and Exodus 15:20-21. Include the results in the summaries.

- **Exodus 4:1-17**, Moses Is Given Power
- **Exodus 5:22-6:13**, God's Plan
- **Exodus 12:1-36**, The Passover
- **Exodus 12:37-42; 13:17-22**, The Departure from Egypt
- **Exodus 14:1-31**, Crossing the Red Sea
- **Exodus 15:1-21**, Song of Liberation
- **Exodus 19:1-8**, Camped at Mount Sinai
- 2. Because elements of the story of *The Exodus* may seem familiar, people often think they already know the story. However, the careful reading required for preparation before this session may have provided the participants with new

insights about God and the way God delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt.

- Project the slide of the following three questions or write the questions on newsprint or a chalkboard. Lead a discussion of one or more of the questions.
- ♦ What did you discover about God as you prepared for the session?
- ♦ What new insights did you gain as you listened to others tell the story?
- ♦ Why do you think the Exodus is one of the most important events in the Old Testament?

At this point you may wish to review with the group the quote from *Understanding* the Old Testament on page 54 of this Leader's Guide.

Project the quote or distribute a copy to each participant.

CLOSING

1. Distribute copies of the responsive reading found at the end of this session. It is based on Psalm 106:1-12, which retells a portion of the story of *The Exodus*.

and/or

Invite the participants to share their responses to Reflection 2 on page 48 of the Resource Book.

- 2. Gather together to close the session and respond in prayer. Ask the members of the group to form a circle. Invite them to share joys and concerns and include these in your closing prayer.
- 3. Extinguish the Christ Candle.

RESPONSIVE READING

Psalm 106:1-12

Leader: Praise the LORD! O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;

People: for his steadfast love endures forever.

Leader: Who can utter the mighty doings of the LORD,

People: or declare all his praise?

Leader: Happy are those who observe justice,

People: who do righteousness at all times.

Leader: Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people; help

me when you deliver them;

People: that I may see the prosperity of your chosen ones, that I may rejoice in

the gladness of your nation, that I may glory in your heritage.

Leader: Both we and our ancestors have sinned:

People: we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly.

Leader: Our ancestors, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your won-

derful works;

People: they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but

rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea.

Leader: Yet he saved them for his name's sake,

People: so that he might make known his mighty power.

Leader: He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry; he led them through the

deep as through a desert.

People: So he saved them from the hand of the foe, and delivered them from

the hand of the enemy.

Leader: The waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left.

People: Then they believed his words; they sang his praise.