



Living in a foreign land
Thirteen Bible studies in Exodus 1-15
by Ros Clarke

Introductory notes

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Introduction

Rescue

The book of Exodus continues where Genesis left off: with the Israelites living in Egypt. But where they were once favoured guests, they are now enslaved immigrants. The first fifteen chapters of Exodus tell how God rescued his people out of Egypt, despite their lack of faith, their inadequate leaders, and the best efforts of Pharaoh to prevent them. These chapters are among the most significant in the Old Testament for demonstrating God's saving nature and explaining the way in which true salvation will come through Christ.

Revelation

Along the way, God reveals himself personally to Moses, with the name Yahweh. Every action of God explains what that name means: his holiness, his compassion, his redeeming power. This God of Israel is our God today.

Response

The God revealed in the Exodus story demands a response. Moses had to respond to God's call on his life, despite his fear and doubts. The Israelites had to respond to his rescue during the Passover by sacrifice and blood. Finally, once they had safely crossed the Red Sea, they responded in praise and song.

These Bible studies are intended for use in small groups wanting to explore the riches of the Old Testament, to see how it is fulfilled in Christ, and to recognise the demands of God on our lives today.

Exodus 1:1-22

1. What were the circumstances that led to the sons of Israel moving to Egypt? Why was Joseph already there?
2. In v. 7, we're told that 'the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly'. Who was told to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis?
3. They also 'became exceedingly numerous'. What promise does this remind you of?
4. What changes happen in vv. 8-10?
5. How well do the Egyptian plans work (vv.11-14)?
6. The next Egyptian plan is even more drastic (vv. 15-19). Why does this one fail too?
7. What is the end result of the Egyptian plan for the midwives to kill the Hebrew boys?
8. Throughout this chapter, the Israelites' suffering increases. How do we know that God had not abandoned them? Do you think they knew that God had not abandoned them?
9. What happens when Pharaoh sets himself against God's plans? Can you think of other examples when a similar thing happened?
10. What is Pharaoh's next step (v. 22)? What do you think he expects to happen next? What do you expect to happen next?
11. What perspective does this passage give on our own experiences of suffering and persecution?

Exodus 2:1-25

1. Why did the Levite woman need to hide her son? Why do you think she decided to place the child in a basket in the Nile? (Look at what Pharaoh ordered in 1:22.)
2. How is the child saved (vv.5-10)?
3. God is not mentioned in 2:1-10. How can we see that he is at work in this situation?
4. What prompts Moses to kill the Egyptian (v. 11-12)? Where do his loyalties lie?
5. When Moses sees the two Hebrews fighting, what does he do? Why do you think the Israelite man responds so negatively (v.14)?
6. What is Pharaoh's response? How is Moses saved this time? (v. 15)
7. Moses runs to Midian where he meets and marries his wife. Why does he name his son 'Gershom'? Where do his loyalties lie?
8. What sort of upbringing did Moses have? Why do you think God gave him this background?
9. What was life like for the Israelites at this time (vv. 23-25)? How do they respond? How does God respond?
10. Moses lives in the Egyptian palace and then in the land of Midian, but throughout, he identifies as an Israelite. What can we learn from Moses about living as 'an alien in a foreign land' as Christians?

Exodus 3:1-4:17

1. If you were appointing a new leader for our church, what sort of qualities would you be looking for? What sort of qualities do you think God requires from leaders?
2. How does Moses know that he is in the presence of God (vv. 2-6)?
3. What is God's plan and what is Moses' role in that plan? (vv. 7-10)?
4. What is Moses' response? Look at 3:11, 3:13, 4:1, 4:10.
5. In v. 6, Moses is afraid to look at God, but by v. 11 he is arguing with God. What does that say about his attitude to God?
6. How does God reassure Moses? Look at 3:12, 3:14, 3:15-22, 4:2-9, 4:11-12.
7. Does it matter that Moses doesn't have the qualities he thinks a leader should have? Why not?
8. Eventually Moses runs out of excuses and just pleads for God to send someone else. How does God respond (vv. 14-17)? Why?
9. God could have chosen a leader who lived among the Israelites, who was confident and eloquent. Why do you think he chose Moses instead? What qualities does God actually require of his leaders? Look at Is 53:2-3.
10. If God chose Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, is there anyone he couldn't choose? What about you?
11. Is there something God is asking you to do that you are afraid you can't? Pray for God's help and do it!

Exodus 4:18-31

1. Why might Moses be anxious about returning to Egypt? (see 1:14-15) Why does he go?
 2. What does God say will happen when Moses goes back to Egypt and does everything God tells him (v. 21)? Why is that surprising?
 3. What does it mean for Israel to be the Lord's firstborn son? Who would you expect to be called the Lord's firstborn son (see Col 1:15,18)
 4. Why does the Lord threaten to kill the Pharaoh's firstborn son?
 5. Is this an appropriate punishment for the Egyptians? (see 1:15-22, but also 1:23)
- Vv. 24-26 are difficult to understand because the Hebrew does not always make it clear who is being referred to (Moses or his son). The most likely interpretation is that Moses' son is circumcised, but Zipporah touches Moses with the foreskin to cleanse him.
6. What is the significance of circumcision for the Israelites? Why does the Lord require Moses' son to be circumcised? Why is it Moses who is endangered, not his son? Think about the role of fathers in Israelite households.
 7. What is Aaron's role in Moses' ministry?
 8. How do the Israelites respond to what Aaron tells them and the miracles they perform?
 9. Do miracles always lead to faith and worship? Does the message of God's rescue plan always lead to faith and worship?
 10. Why do the Israelites respond with faith and worship, while Pharaoh will respond with a hardened heart? Why do some people accept the gospel message and not others?

Exodus 5:1-21

1. What do Moses and Aaron ask Pharaoh for? What response do you think they are expecting?
2. How does Pharaoh respond? Why? Compare Pharaoh's response in v. 2 with Moses' response to God in 3:11.
3. How does Aaron answer Pharaoh's question? Do you think this is a good answer? What else might he have said?
4. This is a different Pharaoh from the one in Exodus 1. In what ways is his attitude the same as his predecessors? See 1: 8-14.
5. What does Pharaoh do to stop Moses and Aaron leading the people out into the desert?
6. The Israelite foremen first complain to Pharaoh and then to Moses and Aaron. What is their complaint?
7. Why has their attitude changed so much since 4:29-31?
8. In what ways do our own circumstances (work, family, health etc.) affect our faith? How do we respond to this?

Exodus 5:22-6:12

1. What is Moses' complaint in 5:22-23? Do you think it is a reasonable complaint?
2. What does God promise to do in 6:1? Will the people be 'let go' or 'driven out'? Does that sound like a pleasant experience?
3. Why does the Lord once again remind Moses of his name and of the covenant (6:2-5)? See especially Genesis 15:13-14.
4. What encouragements are there for the Israelites in 6:6-8?
5. Why aren't the Israelites encouraged by it (6:9)?
6. Despite the Israelites' response, God continues with his plan and sends Moses to Pharaoh. What is Moses' complaint this time? Do you think this is a reasonable complaint?
7. What things make us complain to God? What effect does complaining have? See also Phil 2:14-16.
8. What promises has God actually made to us? What things hasn't he promised us?
9. What things stop us listening to God? How can we do better at this?

Exodus 6:13-7:13

1. Why do you think all the families of Israel are listed here? Why are they important in the covenant promises?
2. Look at 6:13, 26-29. How many times is the word 'Egypt' repeated? Why is it significant that the Lord speaks to Moses in Egypt (and not just out in the desert)?
3. Why is Moses still making excuses (6:30)?
4. How does God describe Moses and Aaron's relationship? What is Moses' role and what is Aaron's role?
5. Again God promises to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. What will this rescue involve (6:3-5)? How will the Egyptians come to know that the Lord is God?
6. What does the miracle show (6:8-12)? How are the magicians able to imitate the miracle?
7. What is the result of the miracle?

God promises in this passage that the Egyptians will acknowledge that he is God. He gives them the chance to recognise his miracle but warns that eventually they will recognise him through his judgment.

8. What makes people harden their hearts to God?
9. How did you come to recognise that the Lord is God? Were you attracted by his promises or afraid of his judgment?

Exodus 7:14-10:29

1. The first eight plagues all follow a similar pattern. Look at 7:14-24 and fill in the outline.

<p><i>The Lord says:</i></p> <p><i>Moses and Aaron do:</i></p> <p><i>The Egyptian magicians do:</i></p> <p><i>Pharaoh does:</i></p>
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2. The pattern isn't always exactly the same. What's different in 8:1-15? What's different in 8:1-19? If you have time, look through the other plagues to see where they follow the pattern and where they are different.

3. Each time, the Lord tells Moses and Aaron to say the same thing to Pharaoh, "Let my people go." What is the status of the Israelites in Egypt? Earlier in Exodus, the Lord has called Israel his firstborn son. On what basis does God tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go?

4. Each time, the Lord warns Pharaoh what will happen if he does not let the people go. Why doesn't Pharaoh let the people go?

5. Each time, Moses and Aaron perform the miracle and the plague comes just as God said. What is God demonstrating through these plagues? See 8:10, 8:22-23, 9:29, 10:1-2

6. On some occasions, the magicians are able to copy the miracles, but in the later plagues they cannot. What is God demonstrating through these miracles?

7. What can we learn about God from his judgement on the Egyptians? How should we respond to God's judgement?

7. Pharaoh shows some signs of relenting as the plagues increase: 8:8, 8:25-28, 9:27-28, 10:7-11, 16-17, 10:24. What prompts him to say these things? What has he learned during the plagues?

8. When each plague ends, how does Pharaoh respond? (8:15, 8:32, 9:34-35, 10:21, 10:27-28). What does this show about his heart?

9. Why do some people appear to show signs of understanding the gospel but then harden their hearts? What can we do to help in this situation?

Exodus 11:1-10

1. What has been the pattern for all the plagues so far?
2. What will be the result of the final plague (11:1)?
3. Why does God tell the Israelites to ask for silver and gold (11:2-3)? And why do the Egyptians give it to them? Is this surprising to you?
4. Who will be afflicted by this final plague (11:4-6)? Why does the Lord target the firstborn sons?
5. Who will not be afflicted by this final plague (11:7)? What does this show about God's judgment?
6. What will be the end result of this plague (11:8)?
7. How will Pharaoh be affected by this final plague (11:9-10)?
8. Why does God arrange for things to happen this way?
9. How do the events of the final plague help us to understand God's salvation of his people through Christ?
10. What is the ultimate purpose of both judgment and salvation? Why doesn't God just save everybody? Why does God save anybody? Why did God save you?

Exodus 12:1-31

1. What do the Israelites need to do to escape the plague of the firstborn (12:1-13)?
2. What kind of animal must they sacrifice? Why do they need to sacrifice an animal at all?
3. What do they do with the blood? What does this signify (12:12-13)?
4. How must they eat their meal? What does this signify?
5. After the Lord gives Moses the instructions for the first Passover, he then gives instructions for how it should be commemorated every year. What must they do at this commemoration (12:14-20)? What will the unleavened bread remind them of (see 12:33-34)?
6. Moses relays God's instructions to the Israelites. Why do you think they are more receptive than the last time Moses addressed them (see 5:19-21)?
7. What does Moses remind the people of in 12:25? Why is this important at this time?
8. In 12:30 we're told that 'there was not a house without someone dead'. Are there any houses in Egypt where there is no death that night? Why?
9. How do the events of the Passover help us to understand God's salvation of his people through Christ? See 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.
10. The Israelites were given elaborate instructions for a celebration which would help them always remember the Passover. What ways has God given us to remember the greater salvation we have in Christ?

Exodus 12:31-50

1. What prompts Pharaoh to let the Israelites go? What would have been different if Pharaoh had let the Israelites go the first time Moses and Aaron asked him (5:1)?
2. How could Pharaoh and the Egyptians have avoided this terrible judgment? How can people avoid God's judgment?
2. Do the Egyptians want the Israelites to go or stay (12:33)? Why?
3. Why do the Egyptians give the Israelites gold, silver and clothing (12:34-36)? Can you think what use this will be to the Israelites?
4. How many Israelites were there in Egypt at the beginning of Exodus? How many are there now? Why is that significant?
5. What else do the Israelites take with them out of Egypt? What did they have when they first came into Egypt (Gen 46: 5-7)?
6. How long did the Israelites spend in Egypt? For how long were they enslaved? What did God promise them about this time? See Gen 15:13-15. How has God kept his promises?
7. When the Israelites leave Egypt they are more numerous and better off than when they arrived. Has this time been a positive or negative experience for them? What effect do you think it has had on their faith?
8. Who is the Passover for (12:43-49)? Why is circumcision the prerequisite for the Passover celebration?
9. What is the Christian fulfilment of the Passover? Who can celebrate it? What is the prerequisite?

Exodus 13:1-14:31

1. Once again, the firstborn is given a special significance in 13:1. Why must every firstborn be consecrated to God? What does that represent?
2. What is the purpose of the commemoration of the Passover (13:3-10)? Why is it a reminder that the law should be on their lips (13:9)?
3. The Israelites are told to 'redeem every firstborn' among their sons. What must they do to redeem them? Why is sacrifice needed for redemption?
4. How will the meaning of the Passover be passed on to each generation (13:14-16)?
5. What things do we do as Christians which need to be explained to the next generation?
6. Why doesn't God take the Israelites the shortest way out of Egypt (13:17)?
7. How do the Israelites know which way to go (13:21-22)? Why do you think God gave them this visible sign of his presence with them? Why doesn't God give us a similar visible sign of his presence with us? What do we have instead?
8. What does Pharaoh worry about after the Israelites have gone (14:5)? What does he decide to do? What is God going to do (14:3-4)?
9. Are the Israelites pleased to have been rescued from Egypt (14:10-12)? Why not?
10. How does Moses reassure them? How has his faith developed over the events of Exodus 2-14?
11. What is the purpose of the Red Sea crossing (14:15-18)? What do the Egyptians think about the Israelites' God (14:23-25)? What do the Israelites think (14:29-31)?
12. Think back over all the events of Exodus 1-14. What has God shown about himself through this? What is the appropriate response to this God?
13. Once again, God rescues his people. How do the events of the Red Sea help us to understand God's salvation of his people through Christ?

Exodus 15:1-21

1. Summarise everything that the Israelite people have been through in the last few months.
2. The Israelites response to all this is to sing songs of praise to God. What actions of God do they praise?
3. What aspects of God's character do they praise? How have these been shown in the events of Exodus so far?
4. In the first part of the song, the focus is on the individual (15:1-2) but in the later part of the song, it shifts to the community (15:13-18). In what ways is their salvation individual and in what ways is it corporate?
5. What are the Israelites looking forward to in this song (15:13-18)?
6. What actions do we have to praise God for? Should we praise God for his acts of judgment?
7. Can we praise God for the same aspects of his character? What other aspects of God should we praise him for?
8. Should our praise be individual or corporate? How do we balance the two?
9. What things do we have to look forward to?
10. Could we sing Exodus 15:1-18 in church? Why or why not? What can we learn from it about the purpose of our worship songs?
11. What do you want to praise God for tonight?