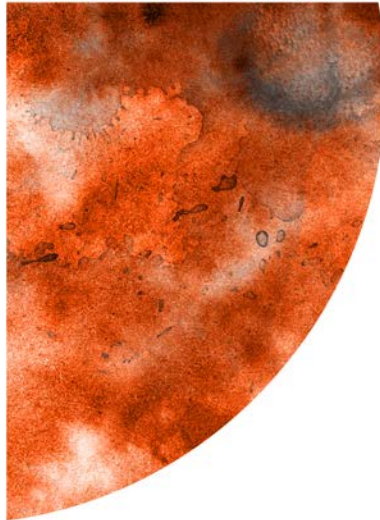
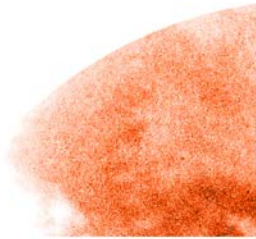


SESSION 1

*God Hears His People*



# Introducing the Study

The God who spoke the cosmos into existence is the faithful God who keeps His promises to His people. He is faithful despite His people's unfaithfulness to Him. Humanity continued to sin against God and wander from Him, yet God would not abandon His promise to rescue and redeem people from slavery to sin and death.

What are some ways you have seen God pursue you?

This God who rescues people from sin is the same God who heard the cries of His enslaved people in the Old Testament. When the children of Israel cried out in despair from bondage in Egypt, God heard them, not because of their faithfulness or righteousness but instead because of the covenant He had made with Abraham. In the same way, we can rest assured that God hears our cries because of His faithfulness, not ours. God is with us in all circumstances and will not abandon us in our sinful state. Instead, He has actively intervened in history, through Jesus, to provide the way of redemption.

Do you think most people have a sense that they need to be rescued from their sin? Why or why not?

# Setting the Context

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Through the many ups and downs of his life, **God used Joseph** to sustain his family. Joseph rose to great power in the foreign land of Egypt, and when a great famine struck the region, his family found the help they needed to survive in their long-lost brother. The family of Israel, numbering seventy, moved to Egypt, but before long, the Israelites were so numerous that Egypt was filled with them. A new king then rose to power in Egypt and began to oppress them, **enslaving them into forced labor**.

- \* How does slavery serve as an appropriate metaphor for the curse of sin and death in this world?

So, God's chosen people, the bearers of His covenant with Abraham, lived in Egypt for four hundred years as slaves. Because they continued to multiply, Pharaoh ordered every male baby of Israelite birth be thrown into the Nile. One Israelite mother hid her son in her home as long as she could. When she could no longer do so, **she put her son in a basket and floated him down the Nile** in faith that somehow he would be saved.

As God would have it, Pharaoh's own daughter found the basket and named the boy **Moses**. He lived as her son in the palace until one day he sought to defend his people. He killed an Egyptian taskmaster but then ran for his life into the land of Midian, where he lived as a shepherd for forty years, not knowing that he would play a crucial part in God's plan of deliverance. **"Moses' Life"** (p. 11) provides a quick overview of Moses' part in God's plan.

- \* How can past experiences of God's faithfulness increase our hope in His future deliverance?

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## † CHRIST Connection

God told Moses His name "I AM" as a revelation of His transcendent self-existence. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the great "I AM," who came to save us from sin.

# Moses' *Life*

0–40

## A Son in Egypt

- Born; placed in a basket in the Nile River; found by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2)
- Killed an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave (Ex. 2; cf. Acts 7:23-24)
- Fled to Midian (Ex. 2)

40–80

## A Shepherd in Midian

- Married Zipporah and had a family (Ex. 2)
- Met with Yahweh at the burning bush (Ex. 3–4; cf. Acts 7:30)

80–120

## A Prophet for God

- Returned to Egypt to confront Pharaoh with the plagues (Ex. 4–12)
- Led the Israelites in the exodus and crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 12–14)
- Led the Israelites to Mount Sinai (Ex. 15–19)
- Gave the people God's law and His instructions (Ex. 20–Num. 10)
- Led the Israelites to southern edge of the promised land (Num. 10)
  - The people rebelled; condemned to wilderness for 40 years (Num. 13–14)
- Disobeyed God in how he brought forth water from a rock (Num. 20)
- After 40 years, led the Israelites to eastern edge of promised land (Num. 22)
- Allowed to see the promised land but not enter it (Deut. 3)
- Died on Mount Nebo (Deut. 34)

# Continuing the Discussion



Watch this session's video, and then continue the group discussion using the following guide.

In what ways are we, or have we been, like the people of Israel, enslaved in bondage?

How should remembering that God has rescued us in Jesus affect the way we live our lives?

*As a group, read Exodus 3:2-10.*



What is evident about the character of God from these verses?

Why do you think God reminded Moses that He is the God of his ancestors?

How do you think you would have responded had you been Moses?

Though it had been four hundred years, God had not forgotten His promise to His people. He remained the same God who called Abraham, and it was time for Him to intervene on behalf of His people. At times, we might be tempted to doubt or forget the promises of God, but we can know for certain that God has not forgotten about us.

*As a group, read Exodus 3:11-15.*

When have you felt like Moses, unqualified to do what you know God has called you to do?



How might God's answers to Moses encourage you when you feel unqualified?

What is significant about God's revelation of His name?



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Moses was asking the wrong question. The issue was not about Moses' identity; it was about God's. God's name is more than something to call Him; it is the revelation of His character. Through this name, God was helping Moses see that He is present with and for His people at all times.

*As a group, read Exodus 7:14-18.*

These verses contain just one of several signs God gave through Moses. Why do you think God chose to deliver His people using signs like these?



What would these signs have demonstrated both to God's people and the Egyptians?

Should we as God's people still expect signs like these? Why or why not?

In performing these signs and wonders, God demonstrated His power over all false gods. Each one of the signs He performed targeted a particular god that the Egyptians worshiped. In this case, the Egyptians worshiped the Nile, and God showed His power over that god. Ultimately, the greatest sign and wonder God performed was raising Jesus from the dead, proving that Jesus is Lord even over death.



## **MISSIONAL Application**

Record in this space at least one way you will apply the truth of Scripture as a believer in the sovereign God who hears His people.

# Personal Study 1

## God listens to the cries of His people.

*Read Exodus 3:2-10.*

It's a simple statement but often one difficult to believe: God listens to the cries of His people. When circumstances mount against us, when the pain in our lives is very real, we might wonder if God really hears our prayers and cries for help. This is surely what the Israelites felt throughout their protracted slavery in Egypt.

Moses, as an Israelite, was likely familiar with the cries of his people that had been offered up to God for four hundred years. The Israelites knew their history, that God had promised their forefather Abraham that He would give them a land of their own and He would bless them in a special way. Perhaps after so many years in slavery, some within the Israelite community wondered if God had gone back on His word.

Despite the decades and centuries that passed, God was still listening. In His mercy, God heard the cries of His people and responded. Notice who initiated the conversation: God came to Moses. God revealed Himself to the man He had chosen to intercede for His people and then identified Himself as the God of Moses' forefathers.

Humans have no right to demand an audience with God. God is not dependent upon us; all of creation is dependent upon Him. God is not accountable to us; we are accountable to Him. God would have been fully just and righteous to create this world and leave it to the natural processes He sustains, never to intervene (by way of a miracle), never to communicate with His human creatures (by way of special revelation), and never to involve Himself with our human plight (by way of redemption). There is nothing about our existence that forces God to be a God who reveals Himself. And yet, God listens to our cries and then acts in response.

God would not allow His people to continue to suffer. Instead, He would intervene to rescue them. Here we see a shadow of the good news of the gospel! The gospel is the story of a God who issues a call to helpless sinners. In our spiritual blindness and deafness, we are imprisoned and enslaved by our own sinfulness. We cannot see the goodness of God until He gives us new eyes. We cannot hear the voice of God until He opens our ears.

But God, out of sheer grace, spoke to us in a most unexpected way—through His Son, the Word. God chose to enter our world of darkness through the person of Jesus Christ. John 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v. 1). And then, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (v. 14). Jesus is God’s Word to us, breaking through our dark, silent prison and saying, “Let there be light!” (“In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it” [vv. 4-5].) In His perfect life and sacrificial death, Jesus revealed God to us. He showed us God’s character. He demonstrated the love at the heart of the Father’s authority.

This same heart of love, grace, and compassion is on display as God listened to the cries of His people. Just as He would later do in the gospel, God would take action on behalf of the Israelites. He would do for them what they could not do for themselves—bring them into freedom and, in so doing, continue to keep His covenant promise to Abraham.

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What have you experienced or are you experiencing that might make you doubt whether God is listening to your cries?

How can reminding yourself of the gospel also remind you that God is indeed hearing you when you cry out to Him?



# Personal Study 2

## God reveals His character.

*Read Exodus 3:11-15.*

In the Old Testament, a name was much more than the means by which you could address someone. A name was a description of a person's character.

Even at this relatively early point in the Bible's story, we've seen the significance of names many times. God had already changed the names of Abram, Sarai, and Jacob. When they encountered God, the fabric of their identities was altered and God signified this change by changing their names. But while we have seen the importance of the names of people, we have not seen the importance of God's name to this point. Even in the foundational covenants God established with Noah and Abraham (Gen. 9:9; 17:2,7), He never explained the meaning of His name—"the LORD," or "Yahweh." Then came Moses' dramatic encounter with Yahweh at the burning bush.

Having been raised in the epicenter of Egypt, Pharaoh's house, Moses knew about the many gods of that ancient land, each with a name revealing something about him or her. Among these were Horus, the falcon-headed god of the sky and the pharaohs; Isis, the goddess of magic, motherhood, and fertility; and Ra, the sun god and creator. But what was the meaning of the name *Yahweh*?

There was good reason for Moses' question about God's name. Though the Israelites were already familiar with the name Yahweh (Gen. 12:8; 26:25; 28:13), they had been enslaved for centuries without any word from this God. Perhaps Moses was voicing the curiosity of many of his kinsmen when he asked the Lord about His name, wondering, "What does Your name signify?" In other words, Moses was asking in light of these long years of suffering, "Who are You?"

Perhaps you can identify with that. Perhaps you too know the feeling of reading in the Bible the promises of God to the believer in Christ and then looking closely at your life circumstances and wondering who is this God who would make such claims. It's during such times when we also might look to God and ask about His true identity: "Are You really the God I've read about? Are You really the God who promises never to leave or forsake me? Are You really the God who works all things for good?"

Yahweh's reply to Moses in verses 14-15 points to His identity as the covenant-making and covenant-keeping God. The Lord had made an everlasting promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations (Gen. 17:4). God had also told Abraham that his descendants would be enslaved for four hundred years but that He would set them free from slavery (Gen. 15:13-14). Now to Moses, God expressed that the meaning of the name Yahweh would be connected forever with His fulfilling the covenant promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Even though Yahweh appeared in connection with a burning flame in a bush, He revealed Himself to Moses as a personal Being, not an abstract force. God makes promises and then He keeps them. He is "to be remembered in every generation" by the name Yahweh, the covenant-keeping King of His people who is always true to His word. This is His name, and His name can be trusted.

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What do God's actions in relation to the covenant teach us about His character?

How does God's mission to rescue His people display His attributes?

# Personal Study 3

## God confronts false gods.

*Read Exodus 7:14-18.*

Having revealed His name to Moses and sent him as His emissary to Pharaoh, God was ready to confront the false gods of the Egyptians and to reveal His glory to everyone living in that land. God's judgment on the Egyptians through a series of severe plagues unfolds in the chapters that follow. Someone reading these passages today might look at these plagues and say, "Are you kidding me? This is bizarre! Is God a cosmic jerk? Was He just trying to annoy the Egyptians?" Or perhaps readers might merely roll their eyes and say, "This is absurd. Miraculous plagues? Really? That is hard to believe."

The series of plagues certainly was strange and severe. But we must understand that there's something bigger going on than what we see at first glance. God was judging not only the Egyptians but also the gods of Egypt. In Exodus 12:12, God said that He was going to perform the last sign, the death of the firstborn, and in so doing, He would "execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt" (see also Num. 33:4).

The plagues fell on all the areas of life that were supposed to have been protected by Egypt's gods. God put His glory on display by judging these false gods—He alone is the Almighty. And God's first display of superior power was appropriate: a miracle on the Nile River.

The Nile was the lifeblood of Egypt. Essentially, Egypt didn't exist without the Nile. It was responsible for transportation, irrigation, water, food, and the setting of the calendar. This type of catastrophe would be similar to cutting off all oil supplies, the stock market collapsing, drinking contaminated water, and having no food in the grocery store. It would be total chaos. It's no surprise that the Egyptians worshiped the Nile as their creator and sustainer. At least three deities were associated with the Nile. But God totally humiliated these gods when He turned the mighty Nile into blood (see also Ps. 78:44; 105:29; Rev. 16:3-7).

The Pharaoh's magicians somehow replicated the miracle. But the fact that the people were digging for water shows that while they repeated the sign, they couldn't cleanse the water of the Nile. Still, Pharaoh refused to humble himself before the one true God (Ex. 7:23).

If you glance at the plagues following this one, you'll notice four recurring elements throughout the ten plagues (in general, not in each and every case):

- 1) The obedience of Moses and Aaron
- 2) God's superior power over Egypt's gods
- 3) Satan's counterfeits
- 4) The perpetual hardening of Pharaoh's heart

But there's one dominant theme: "You will know that I am the LORD" (see Ex. 7:17; 8:10,22; 9:14,16,29; 10:2). God let everyone know that He alone is God. We must not miss this overarching theme in the midst of all the details of the plagues: God's mission is to be known and worshiped.

Because God's mission is to be known and worshiped, this must also be the mission that drives our lives. Just as God would use these signs and wonders to deliver His people from the physical slavery of the Egyptians, so also has He used the wondrous resurrection of Jesus from the dead to deliver us from slavery to sin and death. Now, as His rescued people, we are tasked to seek both the physical and spiritual deliverance of others. We are to work for justice and mercy in physical, tangible ways in the world, all the while preaching the good news of spiritual freedom that can only come through Christ. As we do this, we are declaring the dominance of God over any false gods the world has to offer.

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What are the false gods our society turns to for security?

How does God stand over against these false gods in judgment?

# Session 1 • Leader Guide

## Session Objective

Show that God was at work to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt and return them to the land of promise He had given them through Abraham. (This session will take them to the brink of deliverance, so it will feel like part 1 of 2 in some ways.)

## Setting the Context

Use these answers as needed for the questions highlighted in this section.

- ✱ • A person under the slavery of sin is oppressed and burdened.
- The power to become free from slavery must come from outside oneself.
- Barring freedom and redemption, slavery holds sway over someone until death.
- ✱ • God's faithfulness in the past proves His commitment to remain faithful in the future.
- Salvation from sin through repentance and faith in Jesus means He will one day fully and completely save us from the effects of sin.
- God's faithfulness despite all odds shows that He is in control and will accomplish our deliverance.

Use the following activity to help group members see how Moses' example means we are also able to be used by God in His mission.

Encourage group members to read over **"Moses' Life"** (p. 11).

- Ask: "Looking at the first eighty years of Moses' life, what difficulties would you expect him to have as a leader in God's plan?" (*Moses was spared from the oppression of his people for forty years as Pharaoh's grandson. Moses murdered an Egyptian taskmaster and then fled away from his people in fear. Moses lived in Midian away from the oppression of his people for another forty years. Moses had a foreign wife.*)
- Ask: "If God could overcome all of these obstacles in Moses' life, why do we continue to have excuses that God can't or shouldn't use us?" (*Because we struggle to believe in the grace and power of God. We often succumb to the shame and fear of our own sins. We believe there are limits to God's faithfulness.*)

Read this paragraph to transition to the next part of the study.

Regardless of our excuses, God is the great "I AM"; He is everything we need to live as holy and obedient children. We know this because of how He used Moses, but even more so because He has given us Jesus to rescue us from our slavery to sin.

## Continuing the Discussion

Watch this session's video, and then as part of the group discussion, use these answers as needed for the questions highlighted in this section.

### *Exodus 3:2-10*

- ✱ • God is gracious and sovereign to use whom He wills.
- Though God appears to delay, He is faithful to fulfill His promises.
- God always hears the cries of His people.

### *Exodus 3:11-15*

- ✱ • God's presence with me matters more than my ability, or the lack thereof.
- The goal of obedience to God is worship to His great name, not to mine.
- God is everything we need for strength and obedience to do what He has called us to do.

### *Exodus 7:14-18*

- ✱ • God is in control over His creation.
- God's people would have seen that their oppressors were not as strong as they perceived them to be.
- The Egyptians would have been confronted with the weakness of their so-called gods and religious system.

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Share the following statement with the group. Then direct them to record in the space provided in their book at least one way they will apply the truth of Scripture as a believer in the sovereign God who hears His people.

### ✱ **MISSIONAL Application**

Because God has delivered us from the oppression of sin through Christ, we strive to be conscious of the plight of the oppressed in our world as we seek justice for all and to show and share the love of God.

Close your group in prayer, thanking God for His ongoing presence in our lives and confessing His greatness over every false god.