

The Gospel in Moses' Story

From Bondage to Freedom



Part 1: Introduction to Provision

Studies 1-14

What's Included

For each passage in the study guide for Part 1: Introduction to Provision, Studies 1-14, in *The Gospel in Moses's Story: From Bondage to Freedom*, you will find the following:

- Outlines for each passage designed to be enhanced and elaborated upon through your personal study and preparation.
- Teaching helps embedded within these outlines to guide you as you teach classes or facilitate groups.
- Questions for each passage to assist you, and your class or group, with reflection and discussion.

Suggested Commentaries

- Wright, Christopher J. H. *Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021. Expository commentary for Exodus with New International Version text.
- Turner, David L. *The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Press, 2005. Expository commentary for the Gospel of Matthew with New Living Translation text.
- Brown, Raymond. *The Message of Numbers: Journey to the Promised Land in The Bible Speaks Today* series (revised). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2022. Expository commentary for Numbers with New International Version text.
- Wright, N. T. *John for Everyone: Part 1*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. Expository commentary for John with original translation of text.
- Wright, N. T. *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004. Expository commentary for 1 Corinthians with original translation of text.
- Selvaggio, Anthony T. *From Bondage to Liberty: The Gospel According to Moses*. Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2014. Theological and pastoral reflections on Exodus.

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1. John 5.39-47, “Introduction”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read John 5.39-47 [5 minutes].

2. Discuss the relationship between Jesus and Moses in John 5.39-47 [15 minutes].

- Enter in the middle of a scene: Jesus involved in argument with His usual opponents, Pharisees; complaining about healing taking place on Sabbath (John 5.1-17)
- Jesus describes His authority as coming from the Father, then notes a Pharisee blind spot: they read the Scriptures, but fail to see the witness to Jesus found in them (vv. 39-40); Jesus referring to Old Testament here
- Then Jesus lifts up particular Old Testament witness to His work, Moses, to which they are blind (v. 45)
- Then v. 46 (ESV): “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”
- Jesus claims Moses is clear and cogent witness to His person and work; so most appropriate to read Moses’s story to discover the gospel of Jesus Christ

3. Discuss how viewing Jesus as “the new Moses” helps to illustrate and illuminate the gospel [10 minutes].

- Significant scholarly consensus on Jesus being viewed as “the new Moses”
- How so? Life and ministry of Jesus follows much of the same pattern as Moses’s life and ministry
- More importantly, Jesus fulfills and completes what Moses begins and accomplishes
- Several New Testament books take this pattern and play it out for readers: perhaps #1 in this regard is the Gospel of Matthew, written largely for Jewish audience
 - Both Moses and Jesus led out of Egypt and called to serve
 - Both pass through the water and the wilderness
 - Both givers and instructors regarding God’s Law
 - Both expressions of the glory of God come to earth
 - Both commissioners of those who follow in their footsteps
 - But Matthew insists on numerous occasions that Jesus fulfills or completes what Moses started: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass away from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5.17-18 ESV)

4. Discuss the structure and pattern of the studies to come [10 minutes].

- Young Moses and Young Jesus (Exo 1.1—2.25; Matt 1.18—2.23)
- Burning Bush and Excuses (Exo 3.1—4.17)
- Overview of 10 Plagues (Exo 7.1—11.10; 12.29-32)
- Passover (Exo 12.1-28; Matt 26.17-30; 1 Cor 5.6-8)

- Through the Water (Exo 13.17—15.21; Matt 3.1-17)
- Provision (Exo 15.22—17.7; Matt 14.13-21; 15.29-39)
- Wilderness (Exo 32.1-35; Num 12.1-15; 13.1—14.10; 1 Cor 10.1-14; Matt 4.1-11)
- A Holy Nation (Exo 19.1-9; 1 Pet 2.9-10)
- Law (Exo 19.16—20.21; Matt 5.1-48)
- Lifted Up (Num 21.4-9; John 3.10-17)
- Glory (Exo 33.7-23; 34.29-35; Matt 17.1-13)
- Commissioning (Deut 31.1-8; 34.1-12; Matt 28.16-20)

5. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read John 5.39-47, briefly review the outline for the introductory lesson, and discuss the following:

- As you read over John 5.39-47, what prompts the most interest for conversation? What makes you want to know or discuss more? What questions or controversies arise?
- As the scene opens in John 5.39-47, who is Jesus debating with? What are they complaining to Him about? Summarize the debate between them and Jesus as you understand it.
- How does Jesus pull Moses into the debate in John 5.45-47? How does Jesus say that Moses supports Him?
- This study assumes a strong relationship between Old Testament and New Testament. What are the connections as you see them? What are the red flags to be aware of as well? As we proceed, how may we emphasize the connections and avoid the red flags?
- What are the parallel points or similarities between Moses's story and Jesus's story? Describe how the Moses story helps us to better understand the good news of salvation as Jesus describes and lives it.
- Look over the studies to come on the schedule. Which one covers a passage or topic that seems most familiar to you? Which one appears to cover unfamiliar territory to you? How can both opportunities be beneficial to you in your Christian walk?

2. Exodus 1.1–2.10, “The Young Moses”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 1.1–2.10 [5 minutes].
2. Remind the class of insights from the introductory lesson [5 minutes].
3. Discuss the situational shift of the Jews in Egypt in Exodus 1.1-10 [10 minutes].
 - Multi-generational change: while Joseph and brothers die, Jewish population continues to thrive and grow
 - Out with the old, and in with the new: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” (v. 8 ESV)
 - None of previous history and story recognized by new leadership
 - Jewish presence now seen as problem to be dealt with, disloyal, seditious
4. Discuss the oppression of the Jews by the Egyptians in Exodus 1.11-22 [15 minutes].
 - Response by Pharaoh and other leaders: keep Jews in subjugated role
 - From residents to slaves: brutal forced labor to build cities for Pharaoh
 - Oppression has opposite effect from what is intended (as is often the case): “But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied and spread...” (v. 12 NLT)
 - Oppression breeds more oppression: instructions given to kill male babies
 - Midwives refuse to obey and develop response to give them cover: Jewish mothers, in good physical condition due to hard work, deliver babies too quickly
 - Further instructions: throw newborn Hebrew boys in Nile, but let newborn girls live
 - “The fact is that there are millions all over the world who are, at this moment, living part of this story. It is well documented that there are more slaves in the world today than at the height of the black African slave trade in the early nineteenth century, and many of them toil in precisely the kind of situations that the Israelites suffered in Egypt... To them we must add, of course, the millions who are caught up in the damnable horrors of human trafficking, in forced prostitution, in child armies, in textile sweatshops, in prawn factories, in cruel exploitation of domestic servants, in the virtual slavery of foreign seafarers, and in the overwhelming tide of refugees from war, hunger, and disaster... Those of us, at least, who grew up with Bible stories read to us from childhood can easily retain a rather sanitized mental picture of the Israelites in Egypt, with a few colorful storybook or cartoon images that fall miles short of the brutally cruel and repulsive reality that it was (and still is for so many).” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 68)
5. Discuss the birth and protection of Moses in Exodus 2.1-10 [10 minutes].
 - Now introduced to birth story of Moses: comes from tribe of Levi (priestly tribe)

- Kept hidden for months, but when no longer possible to hide, Moses placed in basket, floated on waters near the banks of the Nile, and watched by older sister
- Providential event: daughter of Pharaoh sees basket; maternal feelings stirred in her by baby's cries
- Recognizes that baby is Jewish; Moses's sister at right time offers to find Jewish nurse for him; Pharaoh's daughter agrees; nurse is Moses's birth mother
- Origin of name given in v. 10

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 1.1–2.10, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In 2-3 sentences, how would you sum up the plot of Exodus 1.1–2.10?
- As you read Exodus 1.1–2.10, what stands out to you as worthy of more study and attention? Why?
- In Exodus 1.1-10, there is a huge multi-generational change in the life of the Jewish people in Egypt. How are they responding? What multi-generational changes are happening to us today? How might we respond?
- In the study notes above for Exodus 1.11-22, we discover that today there are more slaves than at the height of the nineteenth century slave trade. What should the Christian church, and individual Christians like ourselves, do in light of this uncomfortable reality?
- In Exodus 2.1-10, we see God's continuing providential care at work. Trust in this care is a mainstay of Christian discipleship. What happens when we are in seasons of life when we observe little evidence of this care? What steps are needed?
- As you think about the implications of Exodus 1.1–2.10 in the world and in your life, what wound needs healing? What joy needs celebrating?

3. Matthew 1.18—2.23, “The Young Jesus”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 1.18—2.23 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the birth of Jesus and Joseph’s dream in Matthew 1.18-25 [10 minutes].

- Surprisingly little information given on actual birth event (go to Luke for that)
- Much more about providential action of God in Joseph’s life regarding Jesus
- Ordinarily Joseph would not have stayed in relationship with Mary, but angelic vision convinces him otherwise; not last dream Joseph will experience
- Reference to Isaiah 7.14; recurring theme in Matthew of fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and connections

4. Discuss the visit of the Wise Men and Herod’s brutality in Matthew 2.1-12, 16-18 [10 minutes].

- Gentile Wise Men excited by birth of King, while Herod and leadership troubled
- Another connection with OT: Micah 5.2 regarding Bethlehem
- Wise Men sent there by Herod under false pretense of joyful worship; true intent is to eliminate competition and slay rival to his throne (Herod’s paranoia well documented in ancient world: “better to be Herod’s pig than his son,” said Caesar Augustus)
- Wise Men sent away by dream (many dreams in this section) in different direction
- Herod orders elimination of all Jewish males age 2 and under in Bethlehem: note similarity with order by Pharaoh to eliminate Jewish males at birth

5. Discuss the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth in Matthew 2.13-15, 19-23 [15 minutes].

- Second dream comes to Joseph: take mother and child and go to Egypt until it is deemed safe to return
- Egypt perfect location in many respects: safe, outside Herodian jurisdiction; thriving Jewish community in Alexandria (where many believe the Holy Family resided)
- Herod’s death leads to a third dream and return of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Palestine, only not to Bethlehem but Nazareth, again in connection with OT
- Matthew setting up comparisons of Moses and Jesus to come later in his Gospel through use of Hosea 11.1: “In its original context, Hosea 11.1 is not a prediction of Jesus but a reminiscence of the Exodus. That was at least as clear to Matthew as it is to modern interpreters. But Hosea 11.1 alludes to a theological motif that was dear to Matthew—namely, divine sonship. The Exodus demonstrated Israel’s unique status as God’s firstborn son. What was true of Israel on a metaphorical level is more profoundly true of Jesus the Messiah... In Hosea 11.1, the Exodus provides a historical pattern of God’s loving preservation of his son Israel from Pharaoh’s wrath.

From a Christian perspective, this past event is recapitulated by God's loving preservation of his son Jesus from Herod's wrath." (*The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 53-54)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 1.18—2.23, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- Tell the story of Matthew 1.18—2.23 in a few sentences. What must be included in this story and why?
- As you read and reflect on Matthew 1.18—2.23, what stimulates your interest for more discussion or consideration? Describe it briefly.
- In Matthew 1.18-25, the focus is on Joseph. How is he a model for us in taking steps in uncertain directions? When have you been called upon, in the words of 2 Corinthians 5.7, to "walk by faith and not by sight"? How did it go (or is going)?
- In Matthew 2.1-12 and 16-18, we observe the faithfulness of the Wise Men, even as they are Gentile outsiders to the Jewish way. When has having an outsider's perspective enabled you to discern more faithfully what God may be up to? How did things play out in your situation?
- In Matthew 2.13-15 and 19-23, how does Matthew's effort to integrate the Old Testament Exodus with the coming of Jesus help you to understand His mission and message? What does it clear up? What does it bring home?
- What significant takeaway do you have from Matthew 1.18—2.23 for your next week? Sum it up in a sentence or two. Share with the other members.

4. Exodus 2.11-25, “Moses Out of Egypt”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 2.11-25 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the adult Moses’ flight from Egypt in Exodus 2.11-15a [15 minutes].

- As often the case in Biblical narratives, huge sections of time are omitted from biographical review; most of the *Ten Commandments* movie is editorial license, and the story of Jesus skips from infant/toddler to 12 year old to 30 year old adult
- Much hinted at but not expressly stated regarding Moses’s station in life: royal connections, education, means, not a slave making bricks
- Also awareness of his people’s suffering and desire to do something about it
- Sees Egyptian beating Jew, and impulsively responds by killing Egyptian; event becomes known, as Moses realizes through conversation with two Jews next day
- Moses becomes wanted man and forced to flee
- “Moses was clearly a privileged man, but like many men of privilege he allowed this privilege to give birth to personal pride and self-sufficiency. It was his pride that would bring about his fall and his forty-year detour... When the seeds of privilege died the harvest of pride, God sends correction; he did this in the life of Moses by sending him on a detour.” (*From Bondage to Liberty: The Gospel According to Moses*, 17)

4. Discuss Moses’ arrival and extended stay in Midian in Exodus 2.15b-22 [10 minutes].

- Where is Midian? Not quite sure: East of Egypt, including some territory in the Sinai, and south/southeast of Palestine
- Moses comes to rescue again by driving away shepherds trying to keep daughters of the priest of Midian (Reuel/Jethro) from getting water for flocks; more successful in intervention this time
- Moses recognized as Egyptian immediately: Accent? Clothing? Conversation?
- Brought in to eat and stay with family; daughter Zipporah will become Moses’s wife, and together they will have a son named for the Hebrew word for sojourner
- Religion of family? Uncertain: “The fact that Moses agreed to marry into [Reuel’s] family without objection suggests that Moses (and the narrator) saw no conflict between the faith of his father-in-law’s household and the God of his own Hebrew people (though how far Moses’s knowledge of the God of his ancestors extended at this point, prior to the revelation at Sinai, we have no way of knowing).” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 82)

5. Discuss the foreshadowing of God’s response to His people’s cry in Exodus 2.23-25 [10 minutes].

- Summary statement about the death of Pharaoh and the cries of the Jews
- Theological statement about the God of the Jews (who is our God): He hears, sees, and knows; nothing or no one or no event avoids or escapes God's knowledge and awareness
- In faithfulness to promises made long ago to Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12-25), Isaac, and Jacob, He will respond to free His people in His timing and way
- Reminder of years between God's promise to Abraham and the promise bearing fruit

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 2.11-25, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In a couple of sentences, flesh out the narrative of Exodus 2.11-25. What simply must be told?
- As you read Exodus 2.11-25, what draws you in and compels you to dig a little deeper? Why?
- How is the adult Moses you find in Exodus 2.11-15a different from what you might expect of a Biblical hero or heroine? What maturing needs to occur in Moses? How have you matured over the years?
- In Exodus 2.15b-22, where does Moses go to avoid the consequences of his actions back home? How does this new land become home for him?
- In Exodus 2.23-25, we discover a marvelous statement made concerning God. What does it say about Him? What can we learn about how God addresses our hurt, pain, and struggle?
- In light of the implications of Exodus 2.11-25, what will go with you this week? What obstacle needs overcoming? What grace needs sharing?

5. Exodus 3.1-10, “The Burning Bush”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 3.1-10 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the burning bush in Exodus 3.1-3 [10 minutes].

- Moses doing work, keeping his father-in-law’s flocks near the foot of Mt. Sinai (in Hebrew “Horeb”, another name for the mountain)
- Sinai/Horeb identified as “the mountain of God” (v. 1 ESV), probably in reference to events still to come, like the giving of the Law
- Angel appears in v. 2, later identified as the presence of God Himself (often happened in Genesis in the accounts of Abraham, Hagar, and Jacob)
- Miraculous event designed to attract Moses’ attention: a bush burning, yet it is not consumed in the fire
- Fire is ongoing physical representation of the presence of God (Genesis 15 and Exodus 19, just to name two references)

4. Discuss the call of Moses to be in God’s presence in Exodus 3.4-6 [15 minutes].

- As Moses turns to the bush, he hears the voice of God speaking to him a double name call, “Moses, Moses”: double name often used in OT, as with Jacob in Genesis 46 and Samuel in 1 Samuel 3
- Many scholars see additional similarities between this call and the call of Jacob, including 1) the response of “Here I am” and 2) the self-identification by God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- Continuity between this God and the God of Moses’ ancestors is important for Moses to experience and have affirmed; as stated previously, not sure how much Moses actually knows about this God
- To take off sandals is to recognize the “otherness” of the One with whom he will be speaking with; sign of humility, reverence, and respect in ancient Middle East (still practiced when entering a mosque, for example)
- Holiness: being set apart for God’s own purposes and plans

5. Discuss the announcement by God that He will deliver His people from bondage in Exodus 3.7-10 [10 minutes].

- Confirmation of foreshadowing in Exodus 2.23-25
- God knows their sufferings, and not simply is sympathetic about them, but He is planning to do something about their sufferings that will deliver them from their present bondage

- God will lead people to “a land flowing with milk and honey” (v. 8 both ESV and NLT) currently occupied by Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites to claim land promised in covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12-25
- Verse 10 constitutes God’s unexpected call for Moses to be the leader through whom He will work: “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” (ESV)
- “One can imagine Moses listening to God’s stirring speech with a rising sense of amazed excitement and perhaps a feeling of, ‘At last! I’ve waited so long to hear this!’ Until verse 10. Up to that point it is all about what God has seen, what God intends to do. God has a marvelous plan. Good for God! But God will not do it alone. ‘So now, go. I am sending you...’” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 104)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 3.1-10, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- Tell the storyline of Exodus 3.1-10 in a way someone unfamiliar with the Bible would be able to make sense of it. What would you say and how would you say it?
- As you read Exodus 3.1-10, what jumps out at you as being of great importance toward understanding this passage? Why?
- As Exodus 3.1-10 begins, Moses is just getting on with daily life. Then God gets his attention. Has there been a time when God had to get your attention in the midst of your daily life? What was that like? What happened?
- Moses encounters the holiness of God in Exodus 3.5-6 and responds by hiding his face in the dirt. What does “holy” mean? What in your present circumstances could be aptly described as holy? Explain.
- God delivers His call to Moses in Exodus 3.7-10. How does verse 10 in particular radically transform Moses’s life? How does God’s call to us in Christ radically transform our lives?
- Describe at least one way your present life is different from what it might have been because of God’s call upon you. Please be specific.

6. Exodus 3.11 – 4.17, “Excuses, Excuses”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 3.11 – 4.17 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the first excuse Moses gives (and God’s reply) in Exodus 3.11-22 [15 minutes].

- First excuse Moses provides: “What is your name? I don’t know your name”
- God responds in v. 14: “I Am Who I Am,” often transliterated as “Yahweh” or “YHWH”; sometimes translated as “I Will Be that Which I Will Be”
- Raises a question: Who would ask Moses this question and why? Is it because the people are checking up on Moses and want to make sure he is talking to them on behalf of the correct deity? Or because the people themselves do not know God’s name and want to find out for themselves the name of the God they are in relationship since Abraham? Or is Moses simply looking for a quick way out?
- YHWH not just a philosophical statement of existence (although it is that), but a name denoting His continuing presence and relationship; see Jesus in John 8.58-59
- Instructions to gather the leaders of the nation and a promise that the people will listen to Moses as he announces God’s deliverance to the people and that God will bring favor to Moses

4. Discuss the second excuse Moses gives (and God’s reply) in Exodus 4.1-9 [10 minutes].

- Second excuse Moses provides: “We won’t listen to you because you have no evidence the Lord appeared to you”
- God responds with three miracles to perform, first with shepherd’s staff: throw it on the ground, it will turn into a serpent, and then Moses can pick it up and it turns back into staff
- Second miracle is with his own hand: put it inside his cloak, pull it out, and it’s leprous; then put it back in the cloak, pull it out, and hand restored
- If the first two aren’t persuasive, then the third miracle is to pour water from the Nile on the ground, and the water will turn to blood
- All three miracles: deeds that Moses could never do in his own ability, and to do them will show the “I Am” is with him

5. Discuss the third excuse Moses gives (and God’s reply) in Exodus 4.10-17 [10 minutes].

- Third excuse from Moses shows his grasping at straws: “I’m not a good public speaker”
- God responds by promising to help Moses with what to say and how to say it

- Not enough for Moses: still digging in his heels
- God losing patience: tells Moses to bring his brother Aaron along, who is an excellent speaker; God again promises to help Moses and Aaron communicate as needed

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 3.11—4.17, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- What is the who, what, where, when, and how of Exodus 3.11—4.17?
- As you read Exodus 3.11—4.17, what catches your eye and makes you want to follow up and know more? Explain.
- In Exodus 3.14, what does God reveal His name to be? What does this name communicate or represent about God first for Moses, and then for us? How does this name continue to be significant and meaningful for us today?
- How do Moses' excuses remind us of our own excuse-making abilities in our walk with God? What is one excuse you've given lately to God?
- An old saying goes, "God doesn't call the equipped, but instead He equips the called." How does Exodus 3.11—4.17 express the truth of this saying? How does your life experience back it up? Give at least one example.
- As you ponder what Exodus 3.11—4.17 means for you and the world on the basis of your recent experience, please respond to two questions: 1) What call from God needs answering by you? 2) What step in faith can you encourage and enable in someone else?

7. Exodus 7.1 – 11.10; 12.29-32, “Review of the 10 Plagues”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read through Exodus 7.1 – 11.10 and Exodus 12.29-32 [15 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the formula or pattern of the plagues [5 minutes].

- Follow a pattern; not every plague has every element below
- Moses and Aaron interact with Pharaoh with a request to let the people go; sometimes a miracle is performed with Moses’ staff; sometimes Pharaoh’s magicians attempt to match the miracle
- Pharaoh refuses, and the specific plague then is set in motion
- Pharaoh then appears to repent; Moses responds and intercedes
- Then told again that Pharaoh’s heart hardened; happens with every plague
- Some group the plagues into 3 triplets of natural disasters, with set 1: blood, frogs, and gnats; set 2: flies, cows, boils; set 3: hail, locusts, darkness, with the firstborn seen as qualitatively different (not a natural disaster like the others)

4. Discuss the plagues as victories over the gods of Egypt [10 minutes].

- Each plague against Egypt’s pantheon of gods to show God’s superiority
- Careful, however, not to place one-to-one correspondence with particular god and particular plague; Biblical text does not name Egyptian gods with specific plagues
- Blood: Hapi, god of the Nile, bringer of fertility; Isis, goddess of Nile; Khnum, ram god and guardian of Nile
- Frogs: Heget, frog-headed god of fruitfulness
- Gnats: Set, god of desert storms
- Flies: Re, sun god; Uatchit, represented by the fly
- Cattle: Hathor, cow-headed goddess; Apis, bull god
- Boils: Sekhmet, goddess of healing; Sunu, pestilence god; Isis
- Hail: Nut, goddess of the sky; Osiris, god of crops and fertility; Set
- Locusts: Nut; Osiris
- Darkness: Re, sun god; Horus, sun god as well; Nut; Hathor
- Firstborn: Min, god of reproduction; Heqet, goddess attending women at childbirth; Isis

5. Discuss the continued resistance by Pharaoh [10 minutes].

- Pharaoh continually resists entreaties to repent and to let the people go

- Why? “The casual reader’s moral anxiety stems from imagining that if God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, then the poor man had no meaningful choice... But if we are tempted to feel sympathy for Pharaoh on the grounds of God’s alleged manipulative hardening of his heart, we need to read the whole story not so casually. This is the man who persists in rejecting every request and every warning that he receives from Moses and God, even after his own magicians recognize the finger of God, and his whole government pleads with him to see sense and halt the destruction of his country and suffering of his people. Nobody made him do that. This is the man who admits he is in the wrong, confesses his sin, and then chooses the same devastating path time and time again. Nobody made him do that. So when, after six occasions of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, we at last read that God hardens his heart, it is not so much that God is causing him to make those choices but that God gives him up to the choices he has shown himself determined to make and allows the consequences to take their course...” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 225)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 7.1 – 11.10 and Exodus 12.29-32, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In Hollywood, people talk about the “arc” of a show’s story. In a few sentences, how would you unpack the arc of Exodus 7.1 – 11.10 and 12.29-32?
- As you review Exodus 7.1 – 11.10 and 12.29-32, which one of the 10 plagues jumps out at you as being particularly interesting or fascinating or disturbing? Why?
- Think about the patterns each plague works through. What one step regarding Pharaoh takes place in every plague, regardless of the other differences? What is significant about this common step?
- What are some characteristics of a hardened heart today? How do hardened hearts get softened and open to Jesus? Who in your circles desperately needs a soft heart, and how can you help?
- In the Western world, we see few examples of deities like those in ancient Egypt. But that’s not to say we do not worship false gods. What are some of the substitute gods being followed today? What makes these idols so alluring?
- At the risk of being vulnerable, what idol do you personally struggle with the most? What makes this false god so appealing to you? How can you successfully resist its advances?

8. Exodus 12.1-28, “The First Passover”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 12.1-28 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the lamb and the blood in Exodus 12.1-13 [15 minutes].

- A new month and a new era with a new observance and a new people: strong liturgical elements in chapter 12 as well as chapter 13
- Very specific instructions about the lamb: without blemish, male, year old
- Very specific instructions about the sacrifice of the lamb (same day and time: 14th day of the month at twilight) and application of blood on sides and tops of door frames
- Feast that night with roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread; food without elaborate preparation needed; be dressed ready to go on journey
- Lamb’s blood substitute for first born in household: God will strike down first born in Egypt, human and animal, in judgment upon “the gods of Egypt” (v. 12), but pass over the homes marked with the blood on the door frames
- Foreshadowing of substitutionary sacrifice to come in Jesus as the Lamb of God (see Isaiah 53; John 1.29,36)

4. Discuss the bread without yeast in Exodus 12.14-20 [10 minutes].

- Feast of unleavened bread to continue for 7 days afterward as continuance of observance; not separate observance, but continuation of what is started on the 14th day of the month
- Importance of unleavened bread: leave Egypt in a hurry without usual time and procedures for bread making
- Leaven to develop strong connection with the pervasiveness and power of sin, as tiny amount of leaven able to permeate an entire loaf of bread (Matthew 16.6; Mark 8.15; Galatians 5.9)

5. Discuss the permanent observance of the Passover in Exodus 12.21-28 [10 minutes].

- Moses passes on instructions about the Passover to the leaders
- “Executive summary” form given in vv. 21-23; note urgency of Moses
- Part of the people’s experience from this point forward, even to today: “Remember, these instructions are a permanent law that you and your descendants must observe forever. When you enter the land the Lord has promised to give you, you will continue to observe this ceremony. Then your children will ask, ‘What does this ceremony mean?’” (vv. 24-26 NLT)
- People will need annual and ongoing reminders about providence and power of God

- Important to note that commemoration of the Lord's Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke takes place in context of Passover observance

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 12.1-28, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In 2-3 sentences, give a quick snapshot of what is happening in Exodus 12.1-28. What is worth a closer look?
- As you review Exodus 12.1-28, what surprised you? What confused you? What inspired you?
- From Exodus 12.1-13, talk about the specific directions for the sacrifice of a lamb and the application of its blood on the door. How might this foreshadow a later sacrifice and application? Elaborate.
- Why does Exodus 12.14-20 instruct the people to prepare unleavened bread in particular? As you think more about leaven, what comparisons can be found between the characteristics of leaven and the characteristics of sin? How may these comparisons help you understand your own patterns and experiences?
- It is assumed through Exodus 12.21-28 that ongoing, multiple, and multigenerational explanations and reminders of God's sovereign work in the Passover will be needed. In other words, this is not a one-time deal. Why do we need continuing guidance and instruction for walking faithfully as a follower of Jesus?
- As you think about the implications of 12.1-28 in the world and in your life, what positive habits and practices need reinforcing? What messes need cleaning up?

9. Matthew 26.17-30; 1 Corinthians 5.6-8, “Christ Our Passover”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 26.17-30 and 1 Corinthians 5.6-8 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the set up for the Passover observance by Jesus and the disciples in Matthew 26.17-25 [5 minutes].

- Jesus in control of arrangements: meet at particular person’s home, and disciples go there to prepare Passover meal
- Jesus brings up what will happen later in evening: one of you will betray me; stunned disciples ask about themselves; Judas receives confirmation
- Context of betrayal creates space for new rendering of Passover observance, with Jesus to be the sacrificial Lamb of God for new covenant

4. Discuss the adaptations made by Jesus in the Passover ritual about His body and His blood in Matthew 26.26-30 [20 minutes].

- Meal follows prearranged script/order as it has for hundreds of years; Jesus changes the script to refer to new covenant through His body and blood
- Uncertain where in the Seder the changes occur; but quite significant that Jesus makes His alterations within the actual Passover observance
- First announces His body, represented by the broken, unleavened bread, is to be offered; shortly thereafter, announces His blood, represented by the wine, seals the new covenant He is offering and provides for the forgiveness of sins
- Instruction to eat the bread and drink from the cup a participation in and reception of Christ’s saving work
- Christian community understands this newly configured Passover as beginning of new observance to remind and strengthen Christ followers through the years as the original Passover fulfills this purpose for the Jewish people
- “The Lord’s Supper is divinely ordained to remind Jesus’ followers of what he has done and what he will do. Their present existence is framed by Jesus’ past coming to redeem them and by his future coming to reign over the earth. These truths are powerfully impressed onto the hearts of his people when they participate in faith at the table. The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is neither an impotent memorial, an empty sign, nor an automatic source of saving grace. But when it is received in faith, it dynamically strengthens the people of God as it proclaims the central truth of the gospel of Jesus.” (*The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 339-340)

5. Discuss the application of Jesus as Passover Lamb to the challenges faced by the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 5.6-8 [10 minutes].

- Context is sexual immorality occurring and being accepted by church (1 Cor. 5.1-5)
- Paul uses analogy of leaven's ability to expand and take over to describe his concerns about influence of sin in congregation
- Discussion of leaven leads naturally to Passover and to strong pronouncement by Paul: Christ is Passover Lamb, sacrificed for us, bearing our sin, guilt, and shame
- Freed from bondage to sin and able to live "with the new bread of sincerity and truth" (v. 8 NLT); so new ways of living and being in relationship possible through Jesus

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 26.17-30 and 1 Corinthians 5.6-8, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- What is going on in Matthew 26.17-30? In 1 Corinthians 5.6-8? Cover the important actions and statements.
- As you read both Matthew 26.17-30 and 1 Corinthians 5.6-8, what calls for more attention and focus as you move forward with the study? Why?
- What is noteworthy about Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper in the midst of a Passover observance with His disciples? What connections between Passover (remember Exodus 12.1-28) and the Eucharist do you see?
- What does Jesus say the bread and wine represent? Why do you think Jesus tells us to eat and drink these representations of Himself? What does this all say about how we trust, receive, and follow Jesus as Lord?
- If Christ is the Passover Lamb, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5.6-8, how does this freedom from sin's bondage empower us to live lives that please Him? Why do we still struggle with sin's power and attraction?
- A helpful comment on the Presbyterian view of the sacraments comes from the Rev. Dr. David McKechnie, pastor emeritus of Grace Presbyterian Church of Houston, when he officiates at baptism or communion services: "What the Word of God proclaims, baptism seals, and the Lord's Supper sustains." How does the Lord's Supper sustain you in your Christian faith and practice? Does the connectedness of the Lord's Supper with Passover help you see and understand this sustenance better? If so, how and why?

10. Exodus 13.17 – 14.31, “Through the Water: Red Sea”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 13.17 – 14.31 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the exit from Egyptian control in Exodus 13.17 – 14.4 [10 minutes].

- Pharaoh finally allows Israelites to leave; decision to be renounced later
- God sovereignly in control step by step: leads Israelites not to quickest path, but through wilderness to Red Sea, avoiding threat of war in latter-day Philistine territory
- Guidance of the Lord easily perceived through pillar of cloud (day) and fire (night)
- Pharaoh believing Israelites trapped at Red Sea sets stage for final battle and God’s glory over Egypt

4. Discuss the response of Pharaoh and the fear of the people in Exodus 14.5-14 [10 minutes].

- No huge surprise at Pharaoh and Egyptian nobles’s reaction to Israelite departure: Large quantity of cheap labor departs; seen as the last straw, with Egypt already rocked by numerous plague-induced economic and social catastrophes
- Top-of-the-line soldiers in chariots sent to intercept Israelites at Red Sea
- Israelites see Egyptians and panic: “Why did you bring us out here to die in the wilderness? Weren’t there enough graves for us in Egypt?” (14.11 NLT); not the last sardonic and snarky comments to be directed toward both Moses and God
- Moses responds with three terse commands: 1) fear not; 2) stand firm and see; 3) shut up and let God fight for you
- Powerful experience as described by Christopher J. H. Wright: “What then would the Israelites ‘see’? The Israelites had seen Egyptians every day for generations—as cruelly demanding slave masters. Now they were seeing them charging toward them on horses and chariots—as capturing or slaughtering enemies. But, says Moses, you will never see them again... What then did they finally see? Nothing less than ‘the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today’ (v. 13 ESV). The strong word *yeshu’a* (salvation) invests the coming event with deep theological significance. Salvation is a word that will define the very identity of Yahweh himself, as Moses will sing the next morning (15.2) Yahweh, alone among all the alleged gods of the nations, is the God who saves, and the exodus becomes forever a constituent part of what salvation means within the whole Bible story.” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 270)

5. Discuss the acts of God and the salvation of the people in Exodus 14.15-31 [15 minutes].

- Moses given clear instructions by God: tell people to move forward; raise his staff and stretch out his hand over the water (more literally to chop or split the water), so that the people will move on dry ground
- Equally clear indications of God's leading: angel of God moves behind people; pillar of cloud before people; strong east wind blows all night to move waters
- People must step into "the midst of the sea on dry ground" (14.22 ESV); as they step forward in faith, waters are moved back on left and right
- God clearly in control so He will receive glory; Pharaoh receives judgment for pride and arrogance, with army decimated and country devastated
- Dispute over miraculous and natural causation unnecessary: "On the one hand, the Bible itself provides a perfectly natural explanation. A combination of wind and movement of the sea caused a dry corridor for a temporary period, long enough for Israel to get to the other side. On the other hand, who rules the wind and the waves? We have just read the whole narrative of the natural disasters inflicted on Egypt by Yahweh using the forces of creation for his own purposes. The splitting of the sea brings that sequence to a climax." (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 271)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 13.17–14.31, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In 2-3 sentences, how would you sum up the plot of Exodus 13.17–14.31?
- As you read Exodus 13.17–14.31, what stands out to you as worthy of more attention? Why?
- Why does God not lead the Israelites out of Egypt on the quickest path? What intention does God have in mind for them and for the Egyptians? What is God's intention for whatever we are going through at this moment?
- The Israelites are terrified as the Egyptian army advances. Why? What instructions do they receive in the midst of their terror? Think of this in contemporary terms: what strengthens you best when you are fearful and afraid?
- The Israelites have the opportunity to see God at work in a definitive and apparent way. What does He do? How does He do it? What is the result? When have you seen God at work in your life through what you believe were definitive and apparent ways? Please elaborate.
- As you think about the implications of Exodus 13.17–14.31 for the world and for your life, what fear needs assuaging? What hope needs sharing?

11. Exodus 15.1-21, “Through the Water: Celebration”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 15.1-21 [5 minutes].
2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].
3. Discuss the celebration of God’s victory in the past in Exodus 15.1-12 [15 minutes].
 - Time of celebration and joy by the entire nation at God’s triumph over Egypt when things looked bleakest and darkest
 - Triumph over forces of oppression and evil conveyed with poetic image, “the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea” (15.1 ESV)
 - Note expressions of relationship with the God at work in the Exodus: “my God” and “my father’s God” (15.2 ESV); know who the God of the covenant is now
 - 15.3 marks first time in Exodus that any Israelite other than Moses says (or dares to say) the name of the God who saved them
 - Verses 4-10: Reciting of how God triumphed over Egyptian forces in Red Sea: focus on God’s actions, not Israelites’ actions
 - Verses 11-12: summation of God’s glory and victory, setting up next section
4. Discuss the celebration of God’s victory to come Exodus 15.13-18 [10 minutes].
 - Venue changes from Egypt to countries to be overcome as Israelites enter Promised Land
 - Specifically mentioned: Philistia, Edom, Moab, Canaan
 - Reminder in v. 16 of who the Israelites are and to whom they belong: “your people”... “the people you purchased”
 - Israelites to be “planted” in Promised Land: not of their doing, but God’s doing; image like a flower planted in a garden there by the plan and initiative of the gardener, not the flower itself
 - Upcoming fulfillment of covenant promises to Abraham from Genesis 12-25
 - Climax in v. 18 with first mention of God’s kingdom in Old Testament, and to be repeated often in New Testament: God reigns now and will reign forever
5. Discuss the celebration led by Miriam in Exodus 15.19-21 [10 minutes].
 - Interesting that Miriam introduced as a prophet and as Aaron’s sister; she’s Moses’s sister too
 - Leading the singing and dancing, summoning entire community to praise God
 - Understandable celebration from people at very brink of death and destruction
 - “We should not imagine that this was a separate and subordinate ‘women only’ part of the celebration. The word ‘them’ in verse 21 is masculine plural. It does not refer only to the women mentioned in verse 20 but to the men included in ‘the Israelites’

of verse 1... Likewise, the verb 'sing' is a masculine plural imperative. Miriam is summoning the whole community to joyful praise." (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 292)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 15.1-21, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- Tell the story of Exodus 15.1-21 in a few sentences. What must be included for the story to make sense?
- As you read Exodus 15.1-21, what stimulates your interest for more discussion or consideration? Why?
- In Exodus 15.1-12, the focus is on God's victory in the past for the Israelites. What has God done? How does remembering God's work in prior days provide you with insight? Comfort? Strength?
- In Exodus 15.13-18, the focus is on God's victory still to come for the Israelites. What does God promise to do? How does reflecting upon God's work in future days provide you with guidance? Hope? Willingness to move forward?
- In a subtle way, Exodus 15.19-21 shows the importance and necessity for both men and women in leadership roles. How so? Why does God's ministry in today's world need both women and men to serve and lead?
- What significant takeaway do you receive from Exodus 13.17—14.31 for this coming week? Sum it up in a sentence or two and share it with the others.

12. Matthew 3.1-17, “Through the Water: Baptism”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 3.1-17 [5 minutes].
2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].
3. Discuss the introduction to John the Baptist’s ministry in Matthew 3.1-6 [10 minutes].
 - Simple message from John: repent, turn from sin, because the Kingdom is near
 - Seen as fulfillment of Isaiah 40.3: fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy a constant theme of Matthew’s Gospel
 - Unusual attire to emphasize the unusual nature and timing of John’s ministry (more details given in Luke 1 and 3, John 1 and 3)
 - Message strikes the hearts of many in Palestine: go to Jordan River to be baptized by John as indicator of repentance and forgiveness
4. Discuss the teaching/preaching of John the Baptist in Matthew 3.7-12 [10 minutes].
 - John’s attitude changes as Pharisees and Sadducees make their way to Jordan; Why? Come to watch, not to repent and turn; observers, not participants
 - John derides their reliance upon ancestry instead of a living and trusting relationship with God: God able to make descendants of Abraham from the stones around them (v. 9)
 - Judgment is coming, says John, repeating pattern found in Old Testament accounts when leaders held accountable for failure to lead in God’s ways
 - Connection of John’s baptism with the One for whom John is preparing the way: John not worthy “to be his slave and carry his sandals” (v. 11)
 - One to come will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire: probably a “hendiadys,” a figure of speech in which one idea expressed with two words joined by “and”; fire continues as potent representations of the power and presence of God
 - “The images of 3:7-12 present a very different picture of God and his rule than is often presented in pulpits today, where the stress is on God’s provision of goods and services to meet people’s felt needs.” (*The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 61)
5. Discuss the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in Matthew 3.13-17 [15 minutes].
 - Jesus takes initiative: moves from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized by John
 - While baptism of Jesus covered in other Gospels, only Matthew includes dialogue between Jesus and John on John’s hesitation to perform the baptism
 - As Jesus comes out of the water, three things happen that mark His identity: 1) heavens open up to Him; 2) Spirit descends upon Him “like a dove” and settles on Him; 3) voice of the Father proclaims Jesus’s divine Sonship with joy

- Claiming by God done in Trinitarian way: Father, Son, and Spirit all acknowledged and present
- Parallels with Presbyterian understanding of baptism as seal, sign of God's presence
- Connection with Moses's story: as Moses and Israelites pass through the water of the Red Sea and are claimed by God as His own people as Egyptians defeated (Exo 14), so Jesus passes through waters of the Jordan and is claimed by God the Father as His own and anointed by the Spirit for ministry as recognized in baptism (Matt 3)
- Continues shared plot line and typology as Matthew lifts up Jesus as "new Moses" for Jewish readers/hearers:
 - Both led out of Egypt and called to serve
 - Both pass through the water and then the wilderness
 - Both givers and instructors regarding God's Law
 - Both expressions of the glory of God come to earth
 - Both commissioners of those who follow in their footsteps
- Jesus accomplishes and fulfills God's purposes, giving context to Jesus's direction to John, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires" (NLT)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 3.1-17, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- In a couple of sentences, flesh out the narrative of Matthew 3.1-17. What simply must be included?
- As you reflect upon Matthew 3.1-17, what draws you in and compels you to dig deeper. Why?
- Sum up John the Baptist's role in the coming of the Messiah. How are his eccentricities used to highlight both his work and what the Messiah will do? How can God use our eccentricities (don't deny it—you have them) to serve His purposes?
- John the Baptist's teaching and preaching run counter to the way much teaching and preaching is conducted today. How so? What do you think John the Baptist would say if he came to one of our worship services or Bible studies? What may be on target from his perspective, and what might be off base?
- What similarities do you see between the experience of Moses and the Israelites in the Red Sea and the experience of Jesus in the Jordan? How is Matthew attempting to convey that Jesus is the new and improved Moses through this passage? What does this mean for our understanding of who Jesus is and what Jesus does?
- What about the implications of Matthew 3.1-17 for you? What may happen in your world because of what you have encountered in this passage?

13. Exodus 15.22—17.7, “Provision: Manna, Quail, and Water”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Exodus 15.22—17.7 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the provision of water in Exodus 15.22-27 [10 minutes].

- After celebrating God’s victory at the Red Sea, go to the wilderness of Shur
- Three days and no water; then find water, but undrinkable (Marah: “bitterness”)
- Grumbling by the people; Moses goes to God, and God provides means for making water sweet: throw the wood (“log” or “tree”) in the water
- Some consider this a natural remedy, others supernatural; God’s provision is front and center regardless
- More important to note that first miracle after leaving Egypt is restoration of water, even as first plague was turning water into blood (Exodus 7)
- Covenantal response: if Israelites listen diligently to God’s voice and respond with faithful practice, they will not suffer any of afflictions given to Egyptians

4. Discuss the provision of manna and quail in Exodus 16.1-36 [15 minutes].

- Six weeks into journey: lack of trust in God’s provision more pronounced as people led into wilderness of Sin (not named for word in English denoting human disobedience);
- Grumbling will continue throughout travel to Promised Land
- God’s response: bread (or bread-like substance; flaky substance on ground called “manna” for “what is it?”) for morning, meat (quail) for evening
- Just enough and no more: “So the people of Israel did as they were told. Some gathered a lot, some only a little. But when they measured it out, everything had just enough. Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough. Each family had what it needed.” (Exo 16.17-18 NLT)
- Omer: probably two quarts worth; manna disappears as day heats up
- On sixth day, double provisions for day of rest on seventh day: “But then, on the sixth day, the unexpected happens. Everybody ends up with twice the amount they need, and, in their puzzlement, they report the surprising fact to Moses—who has his answer from the Lord ready. He announces something we have not heard before, at least not since the account of creation—the Sabbath day (v. 23). Delightfully, the day is announced, not as a restrictive regulation but as an *explanation* for the double supply of manna the day before... It is God’s gift of rest for everybody—something they had probably never enjoyed as slaves in Egypt.” (*Exodus: The Story of God Bible Commentary*, 309)
- Two-quart container taken and preserved as way to remember what will be 40 years of provisions provided by God; still will not stop complaining, however

5. Discuss the provision of water from the rock in Exodus 17.1-7 [10 minutes].

- End up at Rephidim, where water again becomes an issue
- People argue again with Moses, driving Moses to complain to God
- Moses told to strike rock with staff used to strike the Nile's headwater, and water will come out
- Two previous situations described as God putting people to test; but now Israelites described as putting God to the test (v. 7): "Is the Lord here with us or not?" (NLT)
- Name of location therefore given as "Massah" (test) and "Meribah" (arguing)
- Legitimate to wonder about Israelites after all they've seen of God's provision; also legitimate to wonder about our faithlessness after we have seen God at work in us

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Exodus 15.22–17.7, briefly review the lesson outline, and discuss the following:

- If you were trying to sum up the storyline of Exodus 15.22–17.7 in a few sentences in a way that someone unfamiliar with the Bible would grasp it, what would you say?
- In thinking about Exodus 15.22–17.7, what jumps out at you as being hugely significant toward understanding this passage? Why?
- What does God say He will do if the Israelites remain faithful to Him? How is this especially relevant in light of their past experience?
- What food is supplied to the Israelites? How is it given to them? What else is supplied to them that they did not experience in Egypt, and for the first time in the Old Testament in this passage? How might this gift be beneficial for us today?
- The tables turn in Exodus 17 regarding the Israelites's attitude toward God. How so? What is happening with the Israelites despite all that God has done for them? How do we sometimes mirror the Israelites's attitude?
- Reflect upon and discuss the following C. S. Lewis quote: "The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock [dock=witness stand]. He is quite a kindly judge: if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God's acquittal. But the important thing is that Man is on the bench and God in the dock." ("God in the Dock" in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 244) How do we best conduct evangelism and apologetics in today's world in light of this?

14. Matthew 14.13-21; 15.29-39, “Provision: Loaves and Fish”

OUTLINE

1. Greet one another, begin with prayer, and read Matthew 14.13-21 and Matthew 15.29-39 [5 minutes].

2. Remind the class of insights from the previous lesson [5 minutes].

3. Discuss the need described in Matthew 14.13-15 and 15.29-32 [10 minutes].

- Most scholars hold that Matthew 14 and 15 describe two different events, not the same event erroneously repeated
- Great crowds follow Jesus to desolate hills near Sea of Galilee; many healings occur
- Matthew 14 appears to be one-day event, while Matthew 15 is three-day event; scholars debate if Matthew 15’s crowd is Gentile, in light of context with healing of Canaanite woman’s child in Matthew 15.21-28
- Numbers listed are of men only in attendance: appropriate to make educated guess; double or triple (or more) the numbers by presence of women and children
- Jesus looks upon crowds with great compassion and recognizes significant need of people for food
- Word translated “compassion” (ESV): Greek *splanchnizomai*; image of being deeply moved in the inward parts of the body (gut or entrails); same word used in Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32) to describe father’s response to seeing son return

4. Discuss the response of the disciples in Matthew 14.16-17 and 15.33-34 [10 minutes].

- Disciples see need for food as well, but at a loss as to how to meet it
- Identify very small amount of provisions available (Matt 14: 5 loaves, 2 fish; Matt 15: 7 loaves, “some” fish)
- In Matthew 14, urge Jesus to send people away; in Matthew 15, express dismay at what to do for them
- Important to note parallels with responses by Israelites to God’s provision: both Israelites and disciples doubt greatly, even after experiencing God’s active care in prior circumstances
- Strikes contemporary readers as odd that second occasion in Matthew 15 brings such disbelief and discouragement to disciples; had seen Jesus meet the need before
- Probably important to give disciples some benefit of the doubt, given our own proclivities and flaws

5. Discuss the provision for the people by Jesus in Matthew 14.18-21 and 15.35-39 [15 minutes].

- Jesus takes initiative, multiplying meager resources to feed thousands
- Clearly meant to be seen as supernatural response far beyond human ability

- Also clearly meant to be seen as God's provision for people in great need through His compassion, with Jesus as the new Moses for Matthew and his Jewish readers
- Some scholars doubt authenticity, *a la* William Barclay: everyone shared the food they brought; miracle comes from move from selfishness to expanded generosity
- "Despite the wholesome lesson derived by this interpretation, it cannot be sustained exegetically. It is clear from the passage that the meager stores of the disciples, five loaves and two fish, were somehow miraculously multiplied to feed a crowd of perhaps twenty-thousand people. There is no mention of others bringing out additional food, or any comment about selfishness being turned into generosity... It is more likely that Matthew intended his readers to view this story as reminiscent of the miraculous feeding of the Israelites with manna in the wilderness..." (*The Gospel of Matthew: Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 202)

6. Close in prayer.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

After starting your group with prayer, read Matthew 14.13-21 and Matthew 15.29-39, briefly review the lesson outline, discuss the following:

- What is the who, what, where, when, and how of Matthew 14.13-21 and 15.29-39?
- As you think about Matthew 14.13-21 and 15.29-39, what catches your eye and makes you want to know more? Describe it and share it.
- Jesus's compassion for the crowds motivates His actions. How have you recently experienced the compassion of Jesus in your life? How can you show compassion to people around you?
- It's one thing for the disciples to show a lack of trust in Jesus when it comes to feeding the crowd. It's quite another to show this same lack of trust in Him a second time. How do you explain this recurrence? How do you explain our same tendency?
- When have you desperately needed something that you couldn't provide, and God responded to your need? Describe this experience of God's provision for you and how it strengthens your faith in Him.
- As you ponder what Matthew 14.13-21 and 15.29-39 mean for your life, consider what act of faith Jesus is leading you to take right now. How is Jesus encouraging you to step forward? What will you do to get started in the right direction this week?