

04

SESSION FOUR

The Waters are Parted

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we see what happened to the children of Israel as they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. God demonstrated His worthiness to be praised by guiding His people, manifesting His glory, and delivering them in love. As God's children, we too can praise God for His guidance, His glory, and His deliverance.

SCRIPTURE

Exodus 13:17-22; 14:1-14,21-31

THE POINT

God protects His people and brings judgment upon those who oppose Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Different people enjoy different types of music. Music shows us the diversity of humanity and the different preferences that exist. Music is also a wonderful way to teach God's Word. It is "portable theology," because a song filled with truth is something you get to take with you.

- **What is your favorite album of all time? How about your favorite song? What genre of music do you prefer over others?**

In Exodus 15, we come across an ancient song of praise. Apparently, Moses penned this song right after God delivered Israel from Egypt. Like other songs in Scripture, it's rich in lyrical content. The people could take the truth of God's deliverance with them, and they could remind one another of God's power and grace through this song.

And so they sang: "*LORD, who is like You among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, revered with praises, performing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, and the earth swallowed them. You will lead the people You have redeemed with Your faithful love; You will guide them to Your holy dwelling with Your strength*" (Ex. 15:11-13).

- **What brought about such an expression of praise?**
- **When have you worshipped God with the same attitude of praise and thankfulness over His love for you?**

Option 2

Display a variety of items (or images of items from the Internet) and play a game of "What's it worth?" Hold up one item and instruct students to state what they believe the item costs. After each student has revealed his or her guess, share the correct price. Award one point to the student with the guess closest to the actual price. Continue with each item. Declare a winner. After the game, for each item, ask: Is this item worth this price? Why or why not? How do you determine how much something is worth? Point out that the prices of things change, but God's value never changes.

- **Write WORSHIP on the board. What does worship mean to you? (List synonyms or responses.)**
- **What makes God worthy of your worship?**

Share that God does not have worth just because we assign it to Him—He is worthy because He is God. This study will focus on why we should worship God and why only God is worthy of our worship.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God protects His people and brings judgment upon those who oppose Him

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God:** Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Moses:** biblical patriarch; chosen by God to lead His people out of captivity and to the promised land
- **Pharaoh:** ruler over Egypt

PLOT

As we continue our journey through the story, we see God's people exiting Egypt only to be caught between a rock and a hard place. In this session, we see what happened to the children of Israel as they left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea. Once again, God demonstrates His worthiness and strength as He delivers His people from the armies of Pharaoh.

TIMELINE

THE RED SEA

God continues to provide for His people by parting the Red Sea.

THE WILDERNESS

Israel is to walk in faith and follow after God on their way to the promised land.

THE GOLDEN CALF

Israel commits idolatry against God.

GOD GUIDES HIS PEOPLE

In the previous session, we saw how God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. As we pick up the story, we notice how God guides the Israelites' next steps.

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them along the road to the land of the Philistines, even though it was nearby; for God said, “The people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war.” So He led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. And the Israelites left the land of Egypt in battle formation. Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath, saying, “God will certainly come to your aid; then you must take my bones with you from this place.” They set out from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to lead them on their way during the day and in a pillar of fire to give them light at night, so that they could travel day or night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night never left its place in front of the people. (Ex. 13:17-22)

Notice Israel didn't exit by the way of the sea, though it was the quickest route. They would have arrived in less than two weeks instead of forty years! That was the shortest way, but not the best way. There were enemies in that direction, and Israel was not ready for battle.

The text says, “The people will change their minds and return to Egypt if they face war” (Ex. 13:17). They would have turned back to Pharaoh at the first sign of trouble. Even though they left “in battle formation” (v. 18), this doesn't mean they were ready to fight. Later in their journey, once they reached Canaan and saw how big their enemies were, they said, “Let's appoint a leader and go back to Egypt” (Num. 14:4).

God's route wasn't an easy route. They would spend 40 years in the wilderness, and soon they would be hemmed in between the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army. God planned to teach them many things on this journey; He had other purposes in mind, involving much more than moving them from point A to point B.

Our guidance-giving, promise-keeping God led Israel in a most extraordinary way—by day and by night. God provided a cloud in the day, and fire by night (v. 21). Once again, fire is a picture of God's presence.

GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE

The Israelites' journey takes an interesting turn in the next scene. The Lord tells Moses that an epic showdown is about to take place.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses: “Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you must camp in front of Baal-zephon, facing it by the sea. Pharaoh will say of the Israelites: They are wandering around the land in confusion; the wilderness has boxed them in. I will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he will pursue them. Then I will receive glory by means of Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh.” So the Israelites did this. (Ex. 14: 1-4; for a complete reading of this section, also see verses 5-14).

If God weren't in charge, then one might conclude that this strategy was crazy. Israel was on their way out when God told them to go back and camp between the sea and the desert. If Pharaoh were to pursue them, they would be trapped.

As the story continues, we see how Pharaoh pursued God's people just as God said he would (vv. 5-9). Even though Pharaoh thought he had a good military strategy, he was actually fulfilling the purposes of God. As Pharaoh pursued Israel, he would have used the best of chariots. Egypt had all the modern military advantages. Surely they thought the Israelites would be defeated. Pharaoh was probably singing victory songs before the battle began. But he was wrong.

According to verse 10, when Israel saw the Egyptians, they were afraid. No surprise here! The Egyptians were superior soldiers. They had “weapons of mass destruction” so to speak. But what was the real problem? Israel had forgotten that it was God who brought them to this place. They needed only to fear God and trust in His love. (See Ps. 106:1-10.)

Instead, the Israelites began to complain. Moses told these scared complainers, “Don't be afraid. Stand firm and see the LORD's salvation He will provide for you today; for the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you must be quiet” (vv. 13-14). Stand still? “The Lord will fight for you.” Yes. That's the right strategy. (See also 2 Chron. 20:15-17.) Don't be afraid. The battle isn't yours. Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.

Since God would give the victory, only God could get the glory. This isn't ultimately a story about Israel's victory, but about God's unrivaled, incomparable glory.

- **Do you usually react like the Israelites when your circumstances become difficult?** (*p. 29, PSG*)
- **Why do you think we are so quick to stress out and whine when life gets tough?** (*p. 29, PSG*)

When we are more focused on our circumstances (like the sea and the army in the case of the Israelites), we will always begin to worry. But when we are focused on God and His greatness and power, then no circumstances are too scary because God is always bigger.

GOING FURTHER WITH THE STORY

God implements unusual strategies throughout the Bible. Remember Abraham and Sarah's age when they had a child? Later, we'll learn about Gideon and his little army (Judg. 6–8), Jehoshaphat's battle with the Ammonites and Moabites (2 Chron. 20), and a demon-possessed herd of pigs (Mark 5). Ultimately, God used an unusual strategy with Jesus Christ going to the cross. Satan, like Pharaoh, must have thought that he had Jesus trapped and defeated. Yet God brought deliverance for you, through the resurrection, and He glorified Himself.

GOD JUDGES THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM

Through the end of chapter 14, we find one of the most important stories in the Bible: the crossing of the Red Sea. God will get His people out of Egypt through the miracle of parting the sea, and He's going to judge the Egyptians by swallowing them up in the sea.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back with a powerful east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry land. So the waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left. The Egyptians set out in pursuit—all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen—and went into the sea after them. (Ex. 14:21-23) (for a complete reading of this section, also see verses 24-31).

Moses obeyed the instruction God gave him (v. 21). But think about these instructions: Pharaoh was coming, the people were complaining, and God essentially said, "Hold out your stick, and I will part the waters!" Why? Once again the theme of God's glory is repeated: "I will get glory over Pharaoh" (see 14:17-18). It may have sounded foolish, but Moses obeyed.

As the Egyptians pursued the Israelites, "the LORD looked down," majestically exalted above all (v. 24). He threw the Egyptians into a panic and clogged the wheels of their fine chariots (vv. 24-25). They should have fled, but they didn't. After Israel crossed the sea, Moses stretched out his staff so that the waters came down on the Egyptians and everything with them (v. 26). This was total elimination. At daybreak, the Israelites could see God's victory, for the Egyptians were swallowed up when the water went back into the gap (vv. 27-28). Verse 29 provides a summary statement: "But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with the waters like a wall to them on their right and their left."

TIMELINE

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART I)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to Him.

THE COMMANDMENTS (PART II)

God gives Israel instructions on how to relate to others.

THE TABERNACLE

The tabernacle is built so that God may dwell among His people.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Just as Moses led his people through the waters of judgment to the other side, those who are in Christ will pass through the waters of death to the other side safely because of His mighty resurrection. This is what baptism represents: passing from death to life. In baptism we are saying, “I have died with Christ, I have been buried with Him, and I have been raised with Him!” (See, for example, Rom 6:1-4.)

The true story of the exodus provides a picture of what has happened to us in salvation and in the Christian life:

1. We are saved from bondage. Like the Israelites who were delivered from their enslavement, which is a picture of salvation, we too are freed from the bondage of sin through Jesus.

2. We are saved by grace. In Exodus 14:13-14, Moses tells the Israelites to stand still and “see the LORD’s salvation He will provide for you today” (14:13). He says, “The LORD will fight for you” (14:14). The principle of grace couldn’t be clearer here. Salvation is not about what we do but about what God has done for us in Jesus. (See also Rom. 4:3-8.)

3. We are saved through a mediator. The reason the Israelites didn’t drown in this event is because they had a mediator. Consider Moses’ role: On the one hand he’s identified with the Israelites, and on the other he’s identified with God. But there’s another mediator—a better one—Jesus Christ. He was not rebuked for just one sin, but this mediator took God’s wrath for all our sin. And this mediator was God. (See John 1:1.) Jesus is the only way we cross over. He is our mediator.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

People of God

Scripture describes the church as the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16). Comprised of both Jew and Gentile, the church is created by God through the atoning death of Christ. The term “church” is used in two senses—individual local churches that have covenanted together under the Lordship of Christ, and the universal church that comprises all believers in Christ in all times. As the people of God, the church seeks to live under Christ’s authority while we are protected and cared for by Him.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **Why is it sometimes difficult to trust God's guidance? What are some things we learn as we walk by faith in God's guidance?** *Answers to this question will vary, but should be based on the fact that like the Israelites who doubted God, we too are tempted not to trust His wisdom and goodness toward us as we face many of life's difficult circumstances. While it's often hard to make sense of things in our own minds because we are not God and cannot see the big picture like He does, we can have full assurance that God knows what He is doing, and we can trust Him to get us where we need to be.*
- **When have you been able to look back on your life and see how God has guided you? How does looking at God's guidance in the past increase your confidence in His future guidance?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How do we give glory to God by obeying His instructions even when we don't understand His purpose?** *Obeying God, even in the midst of confusion, demonstrates that we are willing to rely on Him and trust in Him, and not in anything or anyone else. By doing so, we show God to be trustworthy and bring Him glory.*
- **In what ways is the complaining of the Israelites like holding a mirror up to our own hearts?** *It is easy to point to the Israelites and be amazed at their complaining in the midst of God's miraculous work in their lives. However, the story itself also shows that the same attitude and complaining we see in them can also be found within ourselves. Like the Israelites, we too complain and grumble in the midst of God's grace and goodness in our lives.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

The reality of judgment and salvation are clear in Exodus 14:30-31. Imagine the scene—bodies washed on the shore, giving a dreadful picture of unrepentant people. The waters of judgment had come down on those who refused to believe. In contrast, on the other side we see the happy picture of believers who have been saved from the waters of judgment. They were delivered by grace through faith.

- **In what ways have you seen the power of God after waiting a long time for Him to act?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **Why do you think it is important that God's saving actions on our behalf demonstrate our weakness and His strength?** *The reason, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, is because God's power is made perfect in our weakness.*



HEART

In Exodus 15, God's people sing, which is how a saved people should respond. If Israel sang with all their hearts over this salvation, how much more should we who have received a greater deliverance through Jesus? We praise what we prize. Do you prize your Savior?

- **How has God's work of grace and mercy in your life led you to praise Him?** *Answers to this question will vary.*
- **How does the temptation to sin still affect our hearts even after we are redeemed?** *Answers to this question will vary, but might include the fact that sin often causes our hearts to be drawn away from prizing Jesus as we should, tempting us to prize things of far less value instead (things like praise of other people, possessions, relationships, etc.).*



HANDS

Treasuring Jesus for His work of salvation will inevitably lead to a love for others and a desire to see them come to know Jesus in a saving way. It is what fuels obedience to Jesus' command to share with others the good news of what He has done, so that they, too, may come to praise Him and bring Him glory.

- **Why do you think a love for God naturally leads to a desire to make Him known to others?** *One reason is because when a person sees Christ for the treasure that He truly is, and treasures Him more than the things here on earth, then that person will want others to experience that same joy in Christ as well.*
- **How has this session challenged you to live differently?** *Answers to this question will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, point out item #6 to the students, which contains an artistic poster of Moses parting the Red Sea.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/storystart15)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject