



MOSES ONE NATION SYMBOL: PASSOVER



UNDERSTANDING

(for your preparation as a leader)

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DISCUSSION

(to use with your group)

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Goal: That all participants would be inspired by God's covenant with Moses to take a stand against idolatry in their life and in the world.

UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Exodus 3:1–12, 3:18–20, 12:21–23, 32:1–6, 32:25–26

CONTEXT

Context in the Story of Salvation: Into Slavery

Several generations have passed since the time of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac's son, Jacob (also called "Israel"), carries on the covenantal blessing. After an amazing series of events, all 12 of Jacob's sons leave the Promised Land of their forefather, Abraham, and end up in Egypt. While they are there, the Egyptians turn against the Israelites and make them their slaves. Four hundred years go by, and now slavery is all the Israelites know. The land promised to their forefather Abraham is a mere memory — but God remembers His promise.

Context for Our Story Today: Moses and the Passover

Exodus 3:1–12

God appears in a burning bush to a man named Moses, telling him that he will lead God's people out of Egypt. Now, Moses is an unlikely candidate for this mission: In Chapter 2 of Exodus, we learn that he

is a murderer, for one. Additionally, even after God calls him from the burning bush, Moses gives all kinds of excuses for why he can't do it. But this is part of God's plan: that even an "unfit" candidate can become a faithful leader.

Exodus 3:18–20

You probably remember the story from here. God commands the Egyptians to free the Israelites, and Moses boldly proclaims to Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" But is that the whole story? Take a look at your Bible. The command that God actually gives is to let the Israelites go on a three-day journey to worship.

Why is this so important? In Exodus, the key problem is not physical slavery but spiritual slavery. While in Egypt, the Israelites have begun to worship other gods; they have forgotten God's promises. And so, by getting the Israelites out of Egypt, God is trying to get the Egyptian idolatry out of the Israelites.

When Moses finally asks Pharaoh to let the Israelites go and worship, Pharaoh refuses. It is only after Pharaoh's stubborn refusal that Moses and the Israelites must leave completely.

The Lord is zealous for His people and sends ten plagues upon the Egyptians to free the Israelites. Now, these plagues were not just annoying circumstances to persuade the Egyptians; the plagues were a direct assault upon Egyptian gods. For instance, the Nile River was considered a god, and when it turned to blood, it was as if God were saying, "Your god is dead; I am the true God." And during the plague of frogs—another god to the Egyptians—they might just find one of their gods stuck to the bottom of their sandals. The final plague would test not only the Egyptians, but the Israelites as well.

Exodus 12:21–23

With the tenth and final plague, an angel of death is sent to pass through Egypt, killing all the firstborn sons. However, the Israelites are instructed to sacrifice a lamb and, in a very public statement, spread the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their home. When the angel of death saw the blood of the lamb, he would pass over it, and the death of the lamb would take the place of the son.

Now, putting lamb's blood on their doorposts was more than just a strange sacrifice for the Israelites; the lamb was another Egyptian god, and to kill it was a capital offense. This was a do-or-die proposition: If the Israelites refused to sacrifice the lamb, their firstborn sons would be lost. If they *did* sacrifice the lamb, the Egyptians would come after them. It was a dramatic invitation to trust that God would be faithful. This series of events is called the Passover — and it is a sign that reminds us to sacrifice the idols in our own lives, even if doing so seems impossible or has drastic consequences.

This final plague works. The Israelites leave Egypt, crossing through the Red Sea. Shortly after the Exodus, God renews His covenant with Moses and the entire nation, the people of Israel (Ex 24:1 – 11).

CLIMAX: DEFIANCE IN THE DESERT

Exodus 32:1–6

In what seems to be a family tradition throughout history, almost as soon as God renews His covenant, His people rebel. Moses goes up the mountain, and while he is gone, the Israelites get impatient. They gather around Moses' brother, Aaron, and make a request: "Make us a god who will be our leader," they ask, because "we do not know what has happened to Moses."

This might seem like an odd request, but even though the Israelites are now free, their hearts are still enslaved; they miss their old ways. Aaron agrees and makes a golden calf, an Egyptian fertility god. Then we read, “And the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” To “rise up to play” is a Hebrew idiom for sexual immorality. In other words, the Israelites turned their camp into a massive, idolatrous orgy.

Meanwhile, up on the mountain, Moses hears from God about Israel’s misbehavior, and the Lord sends him back to the camp to punish them (Ex 32:9 – 15).

APPLICATION: TAKING A STAND

Exodus 32:25–26

At the heart of idolatry is a fear that God will not satisfy us, and so we think we need to find satisfaction in other things. This is a temptation even after we experience God in our lives: As soon as He seems silent, our prayer becomes dry, or we lose our “retreat high,” we can slip back into our old patterns of sin. But we have a responsibility to fight against idolatry, both in our own lives and in the lives of others. In Moses, we have a model of how to do this.

When Moses witnesses the people’s sin, he takes action immediately. He does not participate, and he doesn’t try to win the people’s favor; he simply calls them to holiness. Moses asks the entire nation of Israel, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me” (Ex 32:26). He “draws a line in the sand,” forcing the Israelites to make their allegiance known. Sadly, only the Levites respond (the Levites are the tribe of Levi, one of Jacob’s twelve sons generations earlier). Like Moses, we may not always get a good response, but we are still called to invite others to be holy.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, God calls Moses, an unlikely hero of faith, to lead the Israelites to freedom. This was physical freedom from slavery in Egypt, but more importantly spiritual freedom from the worship of Egyptian gods. This happens dramatically through the Passover, a do-or-die proposition to be faithful. However, almost immediately after the Israelites are liberated and the entire nation enters into a covenant with God, they become impatient and fall back into idolatry. In Moses, we have an example of how we are to call others to holiness. The Passover is the symbol for this chapter, represented by the image of a door.

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Exodus 3:1-12, 3:18-20, 12:21-23, 32:1-6, 32:25-26

Reminder to the leader of the goal of this chapter: That all participants would be inspired by God's covenant with Moses to take a stand against idolatry in their life and in the world.

OPENER:

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you didn't feel free to be yourself?

(Share aloud with your group.)

Today we are going to move into the second book of the Bible, Exodus, where God's people are now enslaved in Egypt. God desires to save them, but the Israelites have fallen into many pagan practices. They are physically enslaved, but also spiritually enslaved. They are not free to be the people God intends for them to be — so God calls a man named Moses to liberate them.

2. Before we do that, let's review our covenants. Can anyone name all the covenants we have covered in this study so far?

Adam. One Couple. Sabbath.

Noah. One Family. Rainbow.

Abraham. One Tribe. Stars.

(Share aloud with your group.)

Here are some details about what has happened with the Israelites since our time with Abraham. Several generations have passed since the time of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac's son, Jacob (also called Israel), carries on the covenantal blessing. After an amazing series of events, all 12 of Jacob's sons leave the Promised Land of their forefather, Abraham, and end up in Egypt. While they are there, the Egyptians turn against the Israelites and make them their slaves. Four hundred years go by, and now slavery is all the Israelites know. The land promised to their forefather Abraham is a mere memory — but God remembers His promise.

Context: Moses and the Passover

Read Exodus 3:1–12

3. In verse 3:11, Moses says: “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?” We don’t get to read about it much here, but in Chapter 2 of Exodus, we learn that Moses was a murderer — and later in Chapter 4, we learn that he most likely had a speech impediment (Ex 4:10). Why do you think God often calls people who do not seem to be the most qualified?

Allow the group to discuss.

4. Have you ever felt like God was calling you to do something but you didn’t think you were good enough to do it? How does hearing the story of Moses challenge your fears and hesitations?

Allow the group to discuss.

Read Exodus 3:18–20

5. From these verses, what does God ask Moses to say to Pharaoh?

Answer: Moses is supposed to ask Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to take a three-day pilgrimage into the wilderness so that they can worship God.

(Share aloud with your group.)

This is different than what we usually hear about the Exodus, but it is really important: Even more than physical slavery, Exodus is really about spiritual slavery. (We will see this more later.) It is only after Pharaoh refuses to let the people worship that the Israelites must leave completely. After Pharaoh refuses to let them worship, God sends a series of plagues upon Egypt to persuade the Egyptians to let the Israelites go. Now, these plagues are not just annoying circumstances; the plagues were a direct assault upon Egyptian gods. For instance, the Nile River was considered a god, and when it is turned to blood, it was as if God were saying, “Your god is dead; I am the true God.” During the plague of frogs, another Egyptian god, they might have found one of their gods stuck to the bottom of their sandals. God is trying to free His people, but He is also trying to set them free from the worship of these Egyptian gods. The final plague is a test of that faithfulness.

Read Exodus 12:21–23

6. This describes the last of the plagues God sends down on the Egyptians. Based on what we just discussed about the plagues, why do you think each family has to kill a lamb?

Answer: Sheep were worshipped as Egyptian gods. This is the Lord’s way of helping the Israelites reject the idolatry of the culture that surrounded them.

7. Killing a lamb was a capital offense in Egypt, punishable by death. It was the killing of a god. Why do you think the Israelites were instructed to put the lamb's blood on their doorposts?

Answer: This would have been a very public statement, indicating that this household served the God of Israel and did not worship the gods of Egypt. It forced the Israelites to take a side, putting their lives at stake. If their Egyptian neighbors saw this, the Israelites would likely be killed, so there was no turning back once they marked their doorposts. God was asking for total faithfulness.

8. This is a tough situation. Either the Egyptians will come after them or they will lose their firstborn sons. How do you think you would respond if you were an Israelite?

Allow the group to discuss.

CLIMAX: DEFIANCE IN THE DESERT

(Share aloud with your group.)

After the Passover, Moses and the Israelites make it out of Egypt and into the desert. In Exodus 24, God swears a new covenant with the Moses and the nation of Israel, with the symbol of this covenant being the doorpost featured during the Passover. But then, Israel quickly abandons their relationship with God.

Read Exodus 32:1-6

9. Now that the Israelites are safely out of Egypt, Moses leaves them temporarily. After getting impatient for his return, what do the Israelites do?

Answer: They ask Aaron to make them gods.

(Share aloud with your group.)

Just to note, the phrase “rose up to play” is another Hebrew idiom. The Israelites weren’t just having some fun. Bulls and calves were fertility gods in the Egyptian culture, and the worship of these gods included sexual acts. “Rose up to play” is a veiled description of an idolatrous orgy.

10. Why do you think the Israelites would ask for gods?

Answer: They got tired of waiting for the Lord and for their leader, Moses. They easily fell into their old, bad habits from their time in Egypt.

11. The Israelites are still stuck in their old, idol-worshipping ways. Our bad habits — our idols — can be difficult to give up. Why do you think we go back our old habits and how can we overcome these?

Allow the group to discuss.

APPLICATION: TAKING A STAND

Read Exodus 32:25–26

12. Moses calls the Israelites to holiness. How might God be asking you to take a stand and call others to holiness?

Allow the group to discuss.

SUMMARY

(Share aloud with your group.)

In this chapter, God calls Moses, an unlikely hero of faith, to lead the Israelites to freedom. This was physical freedom from slavery in Egypt, but more importantly spiritual freedom from the worship of Egyptian gods. This happens dramatically through the Passover, a do-or-die proposition to be faithful. However, almost immediately after the Israelites are liberated and the entire nation enters into a covenant with God, they become impatient and fall back into idolatry. In Moses, we have an example of how we are to call others to holiness. The Passover is the symbol for this chapter, represented by the image of a door.

