

CONTENTS

Introduction	5
<hr/>	
1 A Page Is Turned: How Is God Preparing Us to Continue the Story? <i>Exodus 1:8-14; 1:22—2:22</i>	9
<hr/>	
2 Discerning the Call: Why Me? Couldn't Someone Else Go Instead? <i>Exodus 3:1-16; 4:10-17</i>	19
<hr/>	
3 A Plague on Your House: How Is God at Work in Human History? <i>Exodus 7:1-13; 12:1-14</i>	29
<hr/>	
4 Let My People Go! How Does God Lead and Provide for the Needs of All? <i>Exodus 14:19—15:1; 16:11-15</i>	41
<hr/>	
5 Laying Down the Law: What Does God Expect from Us? <i>Exodus 20:1-21</i>	51
<hr/>	
6 Don't Have a Cow! How Does God Deal with Those Who Fail to Meet Expectations? <i>Exodus 32:1-20, 30-35</i>	61

Introduction

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies

Welcome to the conversation! The Bible study resources you are using are created to support the bold vision of the Book of Faith initiative that calls “the whole church to become more fluent in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture, in order that we might live into our calling as a people renewed, enlivened, empowered, and sent by the Word.”

Simply put, this initiative and these resources invite you to “Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.”

We enter into this conversation based on the promise that exploring the Bible deeply with others opens us to God working in and through us. God’s Word is life changing, church changing, and world changing. Lutheran approaches to Scripture provide a fruitful foundation for connecting Bible, life, and faith.

A Session Overview

Each session is divided into the following four key sections. The amount of time spent in each section may vary based on choices you make. The core Learner Session Guide is designed for 50 minutes. A session can be expanded to as much as 90 minutes by using the Bonus Activities that appear in the Leader Session Guide.

• Gather (10-15 minutes)

Time to check in, make introductions, review homework assignments, share an opening prayer, and use the Focus Activity to introduce learners to the Session Focus.

• Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

The session Scripture text is read using a variety of methods and activities. Learners are asked to respond to a few general questions. As leader, you may want to capture initial thoughts or questions on paper for later review.

• Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Learners explore the session Scripture text through core questions and activities that cover each of the four perspectives (see diagram on p. 6). The core Learner Session Guide material may be expanded through use of the Bonus Activities provided in the Leader Session Guide. Each session ends with a brief Wrap-Up and prayer.

• Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Lists homework assignments, including next week’s session Scripture text. The leader may choose one or more items to assign for all. Each session also includes additional Enrichment options and may include For Further Reading suggestions.

A Method to Guide the Conversation

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies has three primary goals:

- To increase biblical fluency;
- To encourage and facilitate informed small group conversation based on God’s Word; and
- To renew and empower us to carry out God’s mission for the sake of the world.

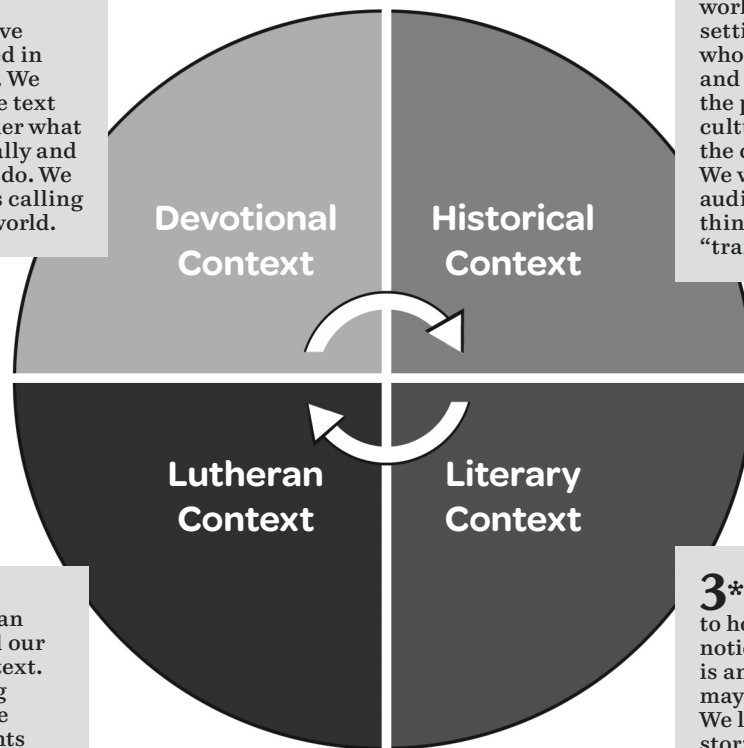
To accomplish these goals, each session will explore one or more primary Bible texts from four different angles and contexts—historical, literary, Lutheran, and devotional. These particular ways of exploring a text are not new, but used in combination they provide a full understanding of and experience with the text.

Complementing this approach is a commitment to engaging participants in active, learner-orientated Bible conversations. The resources call for prepared leaders to facilitate learner discovery, discussion, and activity. Active learning and frequent engagement with Scripture will lead to greater biblical fluency and encourage active faith.

1 We begin by reading the Bible text and reflecting on its meaning. We ask questions and identify items that are unclear. We bring our unique background and experience to the Bible, and the Bible meets us where we are.

5 We return to where we started, but now we have explored and experienced the Bible text from four different dimensions. We are ready to move into the “for” dimension. We have opened Scripture and joined in conversation for a purpose. We consider the meaning of the text for faithful living. We wonder what God is calling us (individually and as communities of faith) to do. We consider how God’s Word is calling us to do God’s work in the world.

2* We seek to understand the world of the Bible and locate the setting of the text. We explore who may have written the text and why. We seek to understand the particular social and cultural contexts that influenced the content and the message. We wonder who the original audience may have been. We think about how these things “translate” to our world today.



4 We consider the Lutheran principles that help ground our interpretation of the Bible text. We ask questions that bring those principles and unique Lutheran theological insights into conversation with the text. We discover how our Lutheran insights can ground and focus our understanding and shape our faithful response to the text.

3* We pay close attention to how the text is written. We notice what kind of literature it is and how this type of literature may function or may be used. We look at the characters, the story line, and the themes. We compare and contrast these with our own understanding and experience of life. In this interchange, we discover meaning.

*** Sessions may begin with either Historical Context or Literary Context.**

The diagram on p. 6 summarizes the general way this method is intended to work. A more detailed introduction to the method used in Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies is available in *Opening the Book of Faith* (Augsburg Fortress, 2008).

The Learner Session Guide

The Learner Session Guide content is built on the four sections (see p. 5). The content included in the main “Join the Conversation” section is considered to be the core material needed to explore the session Scripture text. Each session includes a Focus Image that is used as part of an activity or question somewhere within the core session. Other visuals (maps, charts, photographs, and illustrations) may be included to help enhance the learner’s experience with the text and its key concepts.

For those subscribing to the Web version of Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the Learner Session Guides will be downloaded and printed in preparation for the session, or they may simply be projected for groups that decide to be paperless.

The Leader Session Guide

For easy reference, the Leader Session Guide contains all the content included in the Learner Session Guide and more. The elements that are unique to the Leader Session Guide are the following:

- **Before You Begin**—Helpful tips to use as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Session Overview**—Contains detailed description of key themes and content covered in each of the four contexts (Historical, Literary, Lutheran, Devotional). Core questions and activities in the Learner Session Guide are intended to emerge directly from this Session Overview. Highlighted parts of the Session Overview provide a kind of “quick prep” for those wanting to do an initial scan of the key session themes and content.
- **Key Definitions**—Key terms or concepts that appear in the Session Overview may be illustrated or defined.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—To help the leader center on the session theme and leadership task.

- **Bonus Activities**—Optional activities included in each of the four sections of “Join the Conversation” used by the leader to expand the core session.
- **Tips**—A variety of helpful hints, instructions, or background content to aid leadership facilitation.
- **Looking Ahead**—Reminders to the leader about preparation for the upcoming session.

Session Prep Video

(Available on the DVD that accompanies this unit.) To help you prepare to lead the session, Session Prep Video segments have been created. A guide will walk with you through a session overview and the key parts of the session flow. These segments can provide helpful hints, but they are not meant to replace your own deeper preparation.

Leader and Learner

In Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies, the leader’s primary task is facilitating small group conversation and activity. These conversations are built around structured learning tasks. What is a structured learning task? It is an open question or activity that engages learners with new content and the resources they need to respond. Underlying this structured dialog approach are three primary assumptions about adult learners:

- Adult learners bring with them varied experiences and the capability to do active learning tasks;
- Adult learners learn best when they are invited to be actively involved in learning; and
- Adults are more accountable and engaged when active learning tasks are used.

Simply put, the goal is fluency in the first language of faith, the language of Scripture. How does one become fluent in a new language, proficient in building houses, or skilled at hitting a baseball? By practicing and doing in a hands-on way. Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies provides the kind of hands-on Bible exploration that will produce Bible-fluent learners equipped to do God’s work in the world.

Books of Faith Series

Book of Faith Adult Bible Studies includes several series and courses. This Exodus unit is part of the Books of Faith Series, which is designed to explore key themes and texts in the books of the Bible. Each book of the Bible reveals a unique story or message of faith. Many core themes, story lines, and characters are shared by several books, but each book in its own right is a book of faith. Exploring these books of faith in depth opens us to the variety and richness of God's written word for us.

Exodus Unit Overview

In the story of the exodus we discover that God prepares, calls, leads, and forgives a chosen people, then and now.

This six-session adult study considers the stories of Exodus to be the central stories of the Old Testament. The stories of the book of Genesis, as rich and powerful as they are in themselves, stand as prologue to God's mighty act of choosing Israel, leading this chosen people to freedom from slavery, and establishing with them a covenant (agreement or testament) for their life together. The unfolding of the remainder of the Old Testament story is based on these events and this covenant. The themes of the exodus story continue to be central in the lives of God's people today.

Second only to God, the central figure of the Exodus narrative is Moses. In the early chapters, we read of Pharaoh's oppression of the Hebrews. It is this very cruelty that leads to a son of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob being raised in Pharaoh's own household as a prince of Egypt, becoming a fugitive from justice, and becoming a disciple of the priest of Midian. Moses' story is an occasion for us to ponder the ways that God uses the circumstances of our lives to prepare us to answer a call to service. Session 1 is titled "A Page Is Turned" and deals with the question, "How is God preparing us to continue the story?" (Exodus 1:8-14; Exodus 1:22-2:22).

That call from God becomes explicit for Moses through his encounter with the burning bush. Despite his unique preparation, Moses finds excuse after excuse to avoid answering God's call. We have an opportunity here to consider ways God calls us and ways we evade or avoid God's call. Session 2 is titled "Discerning the Call" and considers the questions, "Why me? Couldn't someone else go instead?" (Exodus 3:1-16; Exodus 4:10-17).

God's confrontation with the gods of Egypt in the 10 plagues is a complex and troubling narrative that causes us to contemplate how God works in our world. Session 3 has the title "A Plague on Your House" and wrestles with the question, "How is God at work in human history?" (Exodus 7:1-13; Exodus 12:1-14).

The incident at the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) is celebrated as a great miracle, yet the people of Israel are unimpressed and are quick to complain to Moses about the uncertainties of their new life of freedom. This story allows us to meditate on God's care through the created order and to consider ways that we too may take God for granted. Session 4 is "Let My People Go!" It challenges participants to consider, "How does God lead and provide for the needs of all?" (Exodus 14:19-15:1; Exodus 16:11-15).

Because of what God has already done to rescue and liberate them, God makes a covenant with Israel, laying down clear expectations for their relationships with God, family, and neighbors. These expectations are every bit as clear, yet every bit as difficult, today as they were then. Session 5 is "Laying Down the Law." It deals with the question, "What does God expect from us?" (Exodus 20:1-21).

Finally, in the story of the golden calf, the people rebel against Moses and against God, providing an opportunity for us to think about how God deals with us in our sin. Session 6 is titled, "Don't Have a Cow!" It poses the question, "How does God deal with those who fail to meet expectations?" (Exodus 32:1-20, 30-35).

Exodus 1:8-14;
1:22—2:22



Focus Statement

The story begun in the book of Genesis continues, as Moses is prepared from infancy for the special role he will play. In a similar way, we look for signs of God's preparation in our lives.

Key Verse

[Pharaoh's daughter] took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water." Exodus 2:10

Focus Image



Moses Laid Amid the Flags,
James Tissot (1836-1902 French)
© SuperStock, Inc.

A Page Is Turned: How Is God Preparing Us to Continue the Story?

Session Preparation

Before You Begin . . .

Consider what events and circumstances in your life have brought you to this moment: born in a particular place, raised in a particular family, experienced certain things, afforded certain opportunities. As you look back now, were these accidents? Fate? Luck? A divine plan? As you lead this session (in which group members will be asked this same question), be open to various ways of understanding.

Session Instructions

1. View the Session Prep Video
2. Read this Session Guide completely and highlight or underline any portions you wish to emphasize with the group. Note also any bonus activities you wish to do.
3. If you plan to do any special activities, check to see what materials you'll need, if any.

Session Overview

As the people of God looked back on their history, they reflected on how they had come to be God's special people. While all in Israel saw God's hand at work in this history, not everyone saw God's hand at work in precisely the same way. Different ways of understanding how God was dealing with the people in their story came to be recorded in differing historical and literary traditions, several of which have been blended together in our Old Testament. The mixing of different traditions added to the richness of the story for ancient editors, but it is often frustrating for 21st-century minds. As modern thinkers, we often want the facts to line up so we can know what "really" happened. In spite of this challenge of reading stories that combine different perspectives, we do have narrative that has a clear point of view about Moses' role in the ongoing story of Israel. And just as these stories combine different perspectives, it is unlikely that members of your group will agree on a "right" answer about how God has been at work in their own lives.

? Traditions:

Although each clan or tribe may have had its own version of the stories, Bible scholars have identified four main points of view in the telling of the stories that came together to form the first five books of the Bible and much of the history books that follow. These perspectives are based on a theory put forth by a German theologian called Wellhausen. This theory cannot be proven, but it has influenced the way many modern scholars of the Bible have described the different major sources that seem to have shaped large portions of the Old Testament narrative history.

- The Yahwist, or J, is associated with Judah and the south; it is possibly as early as the ninth century B.C.E. J refers to the God of Israel by the divine name Yahweh (J in German).
- The Elohist, or E, is dated slightly later than J and is associated with the northern tribes of Israel. E and P (see below) refer to Israel's God by the Hebrew name Elohim.
- The Deuteronomist, or D, is basically Deuteronomy, and is connected to the reforms of King Josiah of Judah in the seventh century B.C.E.
- The Priestly source, or P, is connected with priestly class writing in the exile or post-exile. It is concerned with ritual practice and written in a formulaic style. It includes the Holiness Code, or H, in Leviticus 17–26.

? Scrolls:

Book binding, with pages fastened together as we take for granted today, was not invented until around the second or third century C.E. Prior to this time, writing was done on long strips of animal skins or other material, and then rolled up on thin spools. If the scroll was too long it would be too heavy to hold while reading, so longer works were divided into several scrolls.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Stories told around many campfires over many generations gradually came to be written down. After still more generations, scribes who cared for these writings blended the stories together, weaving them into a wonderful whole, in a process that may have taken as long as 500 years. When this grand tapestry was completed, there were no separate books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. It was all just one grand story, with God's act of delivering Israel from slavery as the central event. But this epic tale was too long to fit on a single scroll, and the division among **scrolls** came to be understood as separate books. Even so, the later editors who delivered to us what we now know as the Old Testament books were careful to have readers understand Exodus as continuing the story begun in Genesis. Between the last chapter of Genesis and the first chapter of Exodus, however, there is a change of scene in the drama. A page has been turned, a fast-forward of several centuries has taken place. Although it is important that the reader keep the Genesis stories in mind, a new king who does not remember these stories arises and reacts with fear and ignorance. A common plot in many ancient myths and legends (not to mention some Shakespearean plays and modern novels) is the villain's own actions bringing about his demise. Moses would have been just another slave had it not been for Pharaoh's decree. But because his mother did exactly as Pharaoh ordered, throwing him into the Nile (though Pharaoh didn't have a basket in mind!), he was drawn out by Pharaoh's own daughter. As Pharaoh's grandson, he would have learned the ways of the king's court, and was probably schooled in all of the strategies of the Egyptian military. We don't know how long Moses was nursed by his mother for wages, but as we see later, it was long enough that he came to understand who his own people were. His concern for their mistreatment led him to commit murder and to flee to the desert. There he learned the geography of this wilderness and the secrets to surviving in it. He also was schooled by the priest of Midian about the God of his ancestors. Thus Moses is perfectly prepared for the difficult job God would call him to do. Was this God's design, or did God merely take advantage of Moses' unique qualifications?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story of the exodus fits remarkably well with the findings of modern archaeology. Joseph's rise to power in Egypt (see Genesis 40–41) probably occurred during one of the "Hyksos" dynasties, about 1640–1532 B.C.E. The Hyksos were Semitic people related in language and culture to the people living in Canaan at that time.

The fall of this line of rulers brought about the 18th dynasty of Egypt, rulers whose family roots were farther south, in the upper (southern) Nile region. Thus, “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). Ancient tablets discovered in the ruins of the upper Nile city of Amarna mention that, somewhat later, the Pharaohs of the 19th dynasty had to defend against attacks from “Apiru” or “Habiru” (**Hebrew**) people to the north. Part of this defense was fortifying the cities east of the Nile delta, including Pithom and Rameses, exactly as Exodus states. Based on this and other archaeological evidence, scholars believe that the Pharaohs mentioned in Exodus were probably Seti I (1291–1278 B.C.E.) and his son, Rameses II (also known as Rameses the Great, 1279–1212 B.C.E.). Despite this firm grounding in history, we need to keep in mind that Exodus is not primarily concerned with historical facts, but facts of faith. The exodus event is not recorded in Egyptian records. This may be because no king builds monuments to a defeat. It may also be that the event, which is so central to faith for God’s people, may not have been considered all that significant to the Egyptians. We cannot know to what extent the drama and scope of the story grew with its repeated telling. The book as we have it today is concerned with magnifying God’s role in calling a chosen people. This is a miracle beyond definition by historians.

LUTHERAN CONTEXT

In the first session of this study, the principle of the plain meaning of the text is important to emphasize for these early verses from Exodus. Beginning Bible students are frequently quick to try to read more into a text than is actually there. These introductory verses are very succinct in connecting to the stories in Genesis and in setting the stage for the events that will unfold in Exodus. The principle that Scripture interprets Scripture comes into play when we view these verses through the lens of the other call stories in the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament discourse on gifts. St. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:6, “There are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” The concept that those whom God calls are prepared with unique talents and skills runs throughout the Bible.

DEVOTIONAL CONTEXT

In explaining the First Article of the creed in his Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote, “I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul. . . . And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or

? B.C.E.:

Before the Common Era, or Before the Christian Era. Historians today usually use this designation instead of the older B.C. (Before Christ), in part because not all historians are Christians, but also because the Gregorian calendar system on which our dates are based is now known to be inaccurate. Scholars believe Jesus was probably born sometime in the years 4–10 B.C.E., and it doesn’t make much sense to say that Christ was born in a year “before Christ”!

? Hebrew:

Originally a general term, probably for a class of refugees, displaced persons, or nomadic people, rather than a particular ethnic group. Exodus uses the term Hebrew broadly in these first two chapters to refer to those oppressed in Egypt. From among this group are the chosen people of Israel. Much later, the term comes to refer to the Israelites and their language.



Tip:

As you turn the page to a new part of the Bible story in Exodus, your group may likewise be turning a page in its life together. Newcomers may be joining. Make sure introductions are made. Name tags may be a good idea. Snacks, or even a meal to celebrate the new beginning, can help all to feel comfortable and secure together.



Tip:

This might be a task they were assigned, a new job they began, a personal or family crisis, or any other challenge they care to identify. Have each group member share with a partner.



Tip:

If the group members already know one another well, and the group is comfortable doing so, these may also be shared with the whole group as time permits.

worthiness of mine at all!” (Kolb, R. & Wengert, T. J., Eds.; *The Book of Concord*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, page 354.) Luther did not detail precisely how God is at work in human lives, but he taught clearly that God is the source of all human talents and abilities. Whether our lot in life is to be a servant or a pharaoh, or any station in between, all we have comes to us as a gift from a gracious God.

Facilitator’s Prayer

Spend time in prayer for your learners and for the session ahead.

Lord God, you prepare leaders and teachers of your people through your gracious gifts. Help me to discern the gifts you have given me for this task. Open my mind and my heart that I may be prepared to lead this group to deeper understanding of your law and your grace in the story of the Exodus. Amen.



Gather (10-15 minutes)

Check-in

Welcome the group and make sure all know one another. Briefly introduce the overall theme of this course and provide any information the group members will need about how the six sessions will be scheduled.

Pray

Lord God, you led the people of Israel to freedom through the work of your servant Moses. Just as you prepared Moses for this great and difficult task, you have prepared us for the tasks to which we are called today. Help us to see the ways in which you have prepared us. Open us to understanding as we study your Word, and lead us to deeper faith in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Focus Activity

Think about a time in your life when you faced a particularly difficult challenge. What resources did you discover that you had to help you face the challenge? What past experiences or advice did you draw on? Did any person provide help? Share your challenge with one or two others.



Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

Read Exodus 1:8-14; 1:22—2:22.

These passages lend themselves to a dramatic reading in which different group members are assigned to read the words in quotation marks that are spoken by the various characters.

OR

As you read the text, ask learners to select a character and imagine they are that character, trying to suppose what that person was thinking or feeling.

Ask learners to reflect on the following questions after reading or listening to the session texts.

- What words or phrases touched you as you heard them?
- What images stood out?
- What questions were raised?

Be sure to write these questions on a whiteboard or chart paper, as you'll be coming back to them again at the end of the session.

Join the Conversation (25-55 minutes)

Literary Context

1. Look through the first part of the session Scripture text, Exodus 1:8-14 and 1:22—2:8. Identify each character's motives: Why did Pharaoh enslave the Hebrews? Why did Moses' mother make the basket in the way that she did? Why did she risk sending her daughter along? Why did Pharaoh's daughter choose to disobey Pharaoh's command and adopt this baby?
2. Take a moment to study the focus image. What do you observe? Imagine how hard it must have been for Moses' mother to set him adrift in the river. What did Pharaoh's daughter risk by saving the baby's life? How do you see God's hand at work here?
3. Look through the last part of the Scripture text, Exodus 2:9-22. List the significant events in Moses' early life. How do you think each of these events prepared him for his future role as God's messenger and leader of the people of Israel? What would he have learned from each of these experiences that would be useful to him later?



Tip:

If assigning parts to read, the main reader is the narrator, who reads everything not in quotes. Other parts will be Pharaoh, Pharaoh's daughter, Moses' sister, Moses, the Hebrew, the priest of Midian, and the priest's daughters. Give these readers a moment to locate their parts and perhaps to mark or highlight them in their Bibles. Or, you might prepare the text on sheets for each character, with the appropriate parts already highlighted.



Bonus Activity:

Scholars believe that the Exodus text as we now have it is woven together from at least three similar, but somewhat different, traditions, or sources of the story. In our reading for this session, Exodus 1:8-12 is believed to come from the J tradition, while Exodus 1:13-14 comes from the Priestly tradition. Compare 1:11-12 with 1:13-14. What subtle differences can you detect in the way the Egyptian oppression is described?



Tip:

If necessary, provide a summary of the traditions listed in the "Traditions" sidebar above (p. 10).



Bonus Activity:

A plain reading of Exodus 1:22—2:10 shows Pharaoh's own daughter knowingly violating the command that "every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile." Speculate about whom Moses would have grown up to be if Pharaoh had not issued this order. What would have happened to him if Pharaoh's daughter had obeyed?



Tip:

Group members may need some prompting to see how Moses' early life in his Hebrew family and his later childhood as a prince in Pharaoh's court contributed to his later role. Try to provide hints or specific questions that lead in this direction, rather than simply giving answers.



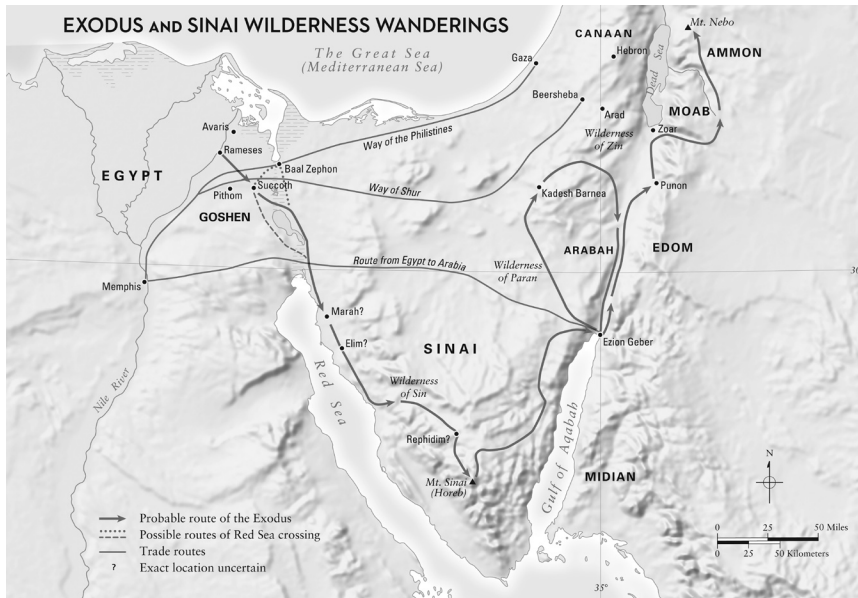
Bonus Activity:

Do an Internet search on the history of Egypt and the dates of the Pharaohs. You'll note several different opinions on the dates, as archaeologists have made many new discoveries in the last 25 years. Discuss how continued discovery enhances or challenges understanding of the text.

Historical Context

From information provided in the Scripture text, and from modern archaeological digs in the ruins of ancient Egyptian cities, scholars have fairly clear evidence to support that the events described in Exodus 1:8-14 actually occurred. Joseph's rise to power in Egypt (Genesis 40-41) probably occurred during one of the "Hyksos" dynasties, about 1640-1532 B.C.E. The Hyksos were Semitic people related in language and culture to the people living in Palestine at that time. The fall of this line of rulers brought about the 18th dynasty of Egypt, rulers whose family roots were farther south, in the upper Nile region. Thus, "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Ancient tablets discovered in the ruins of the upper Nile city of Amarna mention that, somewhat later, the Pharaohs of the 19th dynasty had to defend against attacks from "Apiru" or "Habiru" (Hebrew, perhaps) people to the north. Part of this defense was fortifying the cities east of the Nile delta, including Pithom and Rameses, exactly as Exodus states. Based on this and other archaeological evidence, some scholars believe that the Pharaohs mentioned in Exodus were probably Seti I (1291-1278 B.C.E.) and his son, Rameses II (also known as Rameses the Great, 1279-1212 B.C.E.). If these dates are correct, the events of the story probably took place roughly 3,200 years ago. This is quite amazing, especially considering that many of the Genesis stories (and many other Bible stories) cannot be matched to any historical records outside the Bible at all and cannot be dated.

1. How does this historic information seem to fit some of the details of the story in Exodus 1 and 2? How does this link to historical records outside the Bible make this story more or less meaningful for people of faith? Why? If there were no such records, how might your understanding of the story be different?
2. Look at the map provided (on p. 8), which shows ancient Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula, and the surrounding region. It appears in the map gallery in Lutheran Study Bible. Locate the following places on the map: Egypt, Nile River, Goshen, Sea of Reeds (upper tip of the Red Sea), the Wilderness of Sinai (sometime referred to as the Wilderness of Sin—which comes from the same root word as Sinai and is not a metaphor for human sinfulness), Midian, and Canaan. Note the distances between the locations. For example, how far did Moses have to travel to reach Midian? According to Genesis 25:2, from whom did the Midianites descend?



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3. Egypt was known for its powerful dynasties. Enduring symbols of this fact are the great pyramids, which date to a time several centuries before the events described in Exodus. Imagine that this story had taken place in a part of the world other than Egypt—perhaps in East Asia or South America. How would this change your expectations of how the story would unfold? What would you expect to be different?

Lutheran Context

1. One of Luther's principles for interpreting Scripture is the "plain reading of the text." That is, unless a passage of Scripture is obviously a parable, allegory, poetic imagery, or some other symbolic metaphor, readers ought not to turn it into one. Many times, readers reach for some hidden symbol or meaning in a text simply because they assume the Bible is meant to be read that way. Luther rejected that view, assuming instead that God intends the Word to be clearly understood, not obscured or available only to those with some secret knowledge. A plain reading of this text is indicated because it simply narrates the beginning of Moses' life. Note how the entire story of Moses' birth, childhood, and early adult years is told with so few words and in such a compact form. What is missing? Especially, what is left out between 2:9 and 2:10? Between 2:10 and 2:11?

2. The lives of many Bible persons are summarized in the briefest of descriptions. Even the life of Jesus is capsulated in the creeds

we say each Sunday. Look at the creed we say in worship on many Sundays. The Second Article of the creed is the section that begins, “I believe in Jesus Christ . . .” Look especially at the highlights of Jesus’ life listed in the Second Article.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

- What is unexpected or surprising in this list?
- Compare Moses’ birth and early life to that of Jesus. Luther suggested, as another principle for interpreting the Bible, that all Scripture points us to Christ. How does the story of Moses’ birth and early years remind you of the Christmas story in any way?

3. Another of Luther’s principles for reading and understanding the Bible is that “Scripture interprets Scripture.” That is, we do not read a passage of Scripture in isolation, but we see it in the context of the whole Bible. We look for other Scripture passages that help us to better understand the text before us. The more we read the Bible, the better we understand how the parts connect to one another. Form three groups, one group per passage. Look up the following passages that speak about God’s gifts:

- 1 Corinthians 12:4-12
- 1 Corinthians 12:27-31a
- Ephesians 4:11-13

For each group, respond to the question: What “gifts” did Moses receive in his early life that would equip him to serve as God’s messenger for liberation and leader of the people of Israel? Share your ideas.

Devotional Context

Moses’ early life prepared him perfectly for the mission to which God was about to call him, even though some of those experiences may have been traumatic. Create a “Top 10” list of the key events in your life—much like the very brief list of key events of Jesus’ life in the creed. Consider what events and



Bonus Activity:

How does one “get” or discover a talent or ability? Make a list of ways our gifts may be revealed to us. Join in singing or reading aloud the words of the hymn “Come to Us, Creative Spirit” (ELW 687).

circumstances in your life have brought you to this moment: born in a particular place, raised in a particular family, experienced certain things, afforded certain opportunities.

- As you look back on your life, what experiences have prepared you for the responsibilities you presently have and the challenges you currently face? Were these experiences accidents? Fate? Luck? A divine plan? How have you seen God's hand at work in your life?

Wrap-up

1. Circle back to the group's initial reactions to the Bible passage from the beginning of the session (refer to your whiteboard or chart paper). Ask: Did we find answers to the questions we had at the beginning, or is there more searching to do?
2. On your whiteboard or chart paper, capture any unanswered questions the group may still have. Ask: What factual (historical, literary, or doctrinal) curiosities remain open? As facilitator, you may offer to investigate these yourself during the week ahead and bring responses to next session, or you may ask learners to do so themselves. What other kinds of questions remain?
3. Explain and assign any portion of the homework assignment from this session. Tell the group which portions you want them to work on and why. Remind them to bring their notes and responses to the next session for discussion.
4. Thank group members for their participation and excellent questions. Be sure to affirm all thoughtful engagement.

Pray

Gracious Lord, you have given us good gifts to enable us to live our lives, care for our loved ones, and contribute to meeting the needs of our world. Keep us mindful that all of these talents and skills come from you alone. Continue to open our hearts and minds to your teaching. Watch over us as we set out on our journey from this place and bring us together once again to hear your Word. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Extending the Conversation (5 minutes)

Homework

1. Read the next session's Bible passages: Exodus 3:1-16; Exodus 4:10-17.



Bonus Activity:

Ask group members to draw or sketch images that represent their family members, circumstances, key events, and/or significant people who have been gifts to them and have helped them discern their own gifts.



Tip:

Don't press group members to share life episodes they may not be comfortable revealing to others. But if some members are willing to share experiences, this may be helpful to others in the group.

SESSION ONE

2. In a journal, note ways that today's text influences your life and actions this week. Bring your notes to the next session.

3. Interview one or two people, asking the following questions:

- What people or circumstances have most influenced the direction you have taken in your life?
- Have you sensed God's hand leading you? If yes, how have you sensed this?

Be prepared to discuss some responses at the opening of next week's session. Remind those you interview that you will not use their names in reporting, unless they give you permission to do so.

Looking Ahead

- Read the next session's Bible passage: Exodus 3:1-16; Exodus 4:10-17. If time permits, read all of Exodus chapters 1-6.
- Read through the next session's Leader Session Guide and mark the portions you wish to highlight for the group.
- Make a checklist of any materials you'll need to do the Bonus Activities.

Enrichment

1. Those who want a daily plan for reading through Exodus during this study should read the following sections this week:

Day 1: Exodus 1:1-22

Day 2: Exodus 2:1-22

Day 3: Exodus 2:23-3:17

Day 4: Exodus 3:16-4:20

Day 5: Exodus 4:21-5:14

Day 6: Exodus 5:15-6:13

Day 7: Exodus 6:14-30

2. Consult an encyclopedia or online search engine to discover what sorts of events were taking place in other parts of the world about the time of the exodus story, roughly 1300 B.C.E.

For Further Reading

Exodus (part of the Interpretation Commentary Series) by Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, 1991. Available for purchase through Augsburg Fortress. This, or another recent commentary on Exodus, could be a valuable reference to help answer questions that have come up in this session or that will arise in future sessions.