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SESSION ONE

Exodus 1:8-14;
1:22—2:22

Learner Session Guide

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**

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

Focus Image



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

Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group.

Pray

Your group leader may use the prayer printed below or another method of prayer.

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.

SESSION ONE



Open Scripture

Read Exodus 1:8-14 and Exodus 1:22—2:22.

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

Join the Conversation

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 session 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?

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?

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?



Notes

Notes



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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 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

Be ready to look back over the work your group has done in this session.



Notes

SESSION ONE



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

Homework

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

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.