

4 JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) was a leader in working for freedom and justice for Black Americans in the 1960s. Dr. King was a Baptist pastor who began his work in Montgomery, Alabama. He felt called by God to lead the movement for civil rights in the United States. He hoped his work would help people throughout the world who were denied basic freedoms.

Dr. King's leadership in nonviolent but effective protests and demonstrations helped to create many of the laws that sought to give equal rights and protection to all people in the United States. He sought to ignite the whole nation with a vision of equality and justice that would free people from the slavery of prejudice, poverty, and hatred.

In 1968, Dr. King led a freedom march on Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States. There Dr. King delivered a stirring speech that called for freedom to ring throughout the land.

In his speech, Dr. King said, "And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children—Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics—will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

3 STATEMENTS

- God calls and encourages each person to special tasks and positions.
- The Passover festival is an open invitation to each new generation to make its story of freedom their own.
- When we want to know who God is, we look at what God does.

the

Source

THE SLAVERY OF THE ISRAELITES

The descendants of Abraham and Sarah became a people called the *Israelites* or *Hebrews*. They moved to the land of Egypt where they were first welcomed. However, a new pharaoh or king in Egypt decided to make the Israelites into slaves.

Read one of the Bible passages from Exodus listed on the next page. As you read, imagine that you are a news reporter and photographer stationed in Egypt around 1280 B.C. You have the headline and story all written, but you need a good picture. On a separate piece of paper, draw a picture that illustrates the essential characters and action of the scene so that it can be used with your news story. All Bible references are from Exodus.

- 1:8-14 —Pharaoh issues new order: make Israelites into slaves!
- 1:15-22—Hebrew midwives disobey Pharaoh's command to kill male babies
- 2:1-10 —Baby Moses is saved; grows up in Pharaoh's household
- 2:11-15—Moses kills Egyptian for beating a Hebrew slave
- 2:15-22—Moses helps seven daughters at well; finds new home in Midian
- 2:23-25—God hears cry of people; remembers covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
- 3:1-10 —God calls Moses from burning bush: change jobs from shepherd to leader and liberator of people

MOSES' CALL AND EXCUSES

The telephone rang and you heard a voice at the other end say, "We are beginning a new project at school. We need someone who is a good leader. Your name was mentioned. Would you be willing to be the chairperson for the project?" Your first reaction to such a call was to resist. You said, "Well, I don't know. I haven't really done anything like that before. I get nervous if I have to stand up in front of people. Besides, I'm so busy that I just wouldn't have time. Couldn't you find someone else?"

We often feel we are not qualified or are too busy to say yes to such calls. We often feel the same way when we sense God calling us to follow and serve in some specific way.

In the book of Exodus, Moses is a prime example of one who resisted God's call to a specific task. In Exodus 3-4, God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land. God's call to Moses was the first time in the Bible that God asked someone to take on the role of leadership among God's people.

God said to Moses, "So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:10). Moses immediately objected to God's call with a series of five excuses.

Following is a list of the excuses Moses gave. Read God's response to each excuse and summarize it in your own words.

- *First excuse*—"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11)
God's response—Exodus 3:12
-

- *Second excuse*—"If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (Exodus 3:13)
God's response—Exodus 3:14-22
-

God calls and encourages each person to special tasks and positions.



- *Third excuse*—"But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The LORD did not appear to you?'" (Exodus 4:1)

God's response—Exodus 4:2-9

- *Fourth excuse*—"O my LORD, I have never been eloquent . . . I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Exodus 4:10)

God's response—Exodus 4:11-12

- *Fifth excuse*—"O my LORD, please send someone else." (Exodus 4:13)

God's response—Exodus 4:14-17

Finally Moses did respond. "Moses took his wife and his son, put them on a donkey and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand" (Exodus 4:20).

1. Place yourself in Moses' shoes. Which one of the five excuses would you feel most strongly?

Why?

2. Apply God's response to that excuse by Moses to yourself. How do you find comfort or encouragement from God's words?

We may feel inadequate and unsure of our gifts, but God does not abandon us as failures. *God calls and encourages each person to special tasks and positions.* You have been called by God to be many things: a son or daughter in a family, a student, a member of a confirmation class, a worshiper, a friend, a helper, a member and perhaps a leader of a team or organization, and a neighbor. All of these and many other callings or roles into which God will lead you are ways you can serve God and other people. All of them are important ways you can use the gifts God gives you for others. God promises to be with you and to give you the talents and strength necessary to do what is helpful in every role. God was with Moses, and God will be with you.

THE PLAGUES AND THE PASSOVER

After Moses accepted the call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and to say, "Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1). But Pharaoh refused. God then sent a series of ten plagues or disasters on Egypt in order to change Pharaoh's mind. The Nile River turned to blood. Frogs, gnats, and flies invaded the land. All of the animals

became sick and died. Boils appeared on everyone's skin. Hail fell and destroyed the crops. Locusts swarmed in, and daylight turned to darkness. After each one of these plagues sent by God Pharaoh still refused to let the people of Israel go. He wanted to keep them as his slaves.

Finally, the only way left was to let the tenth and worst plague fall upon the Egyptians—the death of all firstborn. This tenth plague became the basis for a meal that was to be celebrated every spring by every Israelite family. The meal was a way of reliving the story of the Passover, the night when the angel of death killed all the firstborn children and livestock in Egypt. Because God had told the Israelites to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a lamb, the angel of death passed over the Israelite households and spared them.

This last and terrible plague finally convinced Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. From that time on until today the Passover meal is celebrated as a festival of freedom. People of the Jewish faith continue to celebrate this festival every year.

Christians also share in the Passover in a unique way. The Gospels report that it was this Passover meal that Jesus celebrated with the disciples on the night before he was crucified (Mark 14:12-25). Jesus used the wine and the unleavened bread of the Passover meal to give the meal a new form and meaning. Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion as a remembrance of Jesus' death and resurrection which frees us from the power of sin and death. It is this freedom in Christ that Christians remember in this meal.

The Passover meal with its story of the rescue and exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is intended to be a reminder of God's saving acts. In this way, Jewish families in every generation relive the exodus story. *The Passover festival is an open invitation to each new generation to make its story of freedom their own.*

The Passover festival is an open invitation to each new generation to make its story of freedom their own.

Shaping life

THE EXODUS: GOD IS WHAT GOD DOES

The story of God freeing the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt is the most important story of the entire Old Testament. The story defines who God is and what God wants for all people. *When we want to know who God is, we look at what God does.* God said, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2).

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses asked for God's name. In the ancient world of Israel, to know someone's name was to know something about the center or deepest part of a person. Thus, Moses wanted to know who God was at the deepest level.

1. Read Exodus 3:13-14. What is God's name?

The name can be translated "I will be who I will be." In other words, says God, "Just stay tuned and watch what I do; then you will learn who I really am as your God."

2. What God did in the exodus revealed many of God's qualities. Describe some of these qualities of God as revealed in the actions of God for Israel.

When we want to know who God is, we look at what God does.

3. What do you believe God has done or is doing in your own life? Which qualities of God revealed in the exodus story are part of your own personal experience or understanding of God?



FURTHER

opportunities

Bible Reading

Select one or more passages from the list below. After reading it, summarize its main point. Tell how it relates to this session. List one or two thoughts you had as you read the passage.

- Exodus 15:1-18
- Psalm 103:6-18
- Psalm 20
- Hebrews 11:23-28
- Mark 14:12-25

Memory

Memorize Exodus 15:1-2. Some of the most ancient words of the entire Bible are found in a song Moses sang after the great deliverance from the Egyptians.

Activity 1

Write a one- or two-page essay

entitled "Gifts and Calling" that describes the gifts God has given you and possible vocations that would require those gifts. Share your essay with a parent, pastor, teacher, or friend.

Activity 2

Go to your school, church, or community library and look up an encyclopedia, book, or magazine article about the Passover festival. Write a one-page report about it. If you have Jewish people in your community, you may want to interview them concerning their understanding of the Passover. Share what you discover with your class.

Activity 3

Do a research project on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., or another leader who has worked for the freedom of people. Present it to the class.

FOCUS

ON FREEDOM WORKERS

Raoul Wallenberg worked for the freedom of oppressed people. No one knows for certain whether he is dead or alive.

Wallenberg was an ambassador in the Swedish embassy in Hungary during World War II. During the war, the Nazi government of Germany murdered over 6 million Jewish people throughout Europe simply because they were Jewish. Wallenberg, a committed Christian, wanted to help stop this, but

he knew any activity against the Nazi government would place him in great danger. He used the Swedish embassy and his status as an ambassador to falsify the passports and other documents of thousands of Jews. This allowed many Jews to escape to freedom.

Even though he had a level of immunity as an ambassador, he knew his actions were illegal. Many times the Nazi secret police tried to arrest Wallenberg for his actions against their government.

With the help of his friends, Wallenberg always escaped.

One day he learned there was another search for him in progress. He drove east toward the advancing Russian army and was never heard from again, although there is some evidence that he died in 1947.