

# GOD THE REDEEMER

A Gospel-Centered Exploration in EXODUS



TONY MERIDA



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## ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it's so much more. Sure, the Bible has some stories in it, but it's also full of poetry, history, codes of law and civilization, songs, prophecy, letters—even a love letter. When you tie it all together, something remarkable happens. A story is revealed. One story. The story of redemption through Jesus. This is *The Gospel Project*.

When we begin to see the Bible as the story of redemption through Jesus Christ, God's plan to rescue the world from sin and death, our perspective changes. We no longer look primarily for what the Bible says about us but instead see what it tells us about God and what He has done. After all, it's the gospel that saves us, and when we encounter Jesus in the pages of Scripture, the gospel works on us, transforming us into His image. *We become God's gospel project.*

## ABOUT THE WRITERS



### **Tony Merida**

Tony Merida is the founding pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. He also serves as associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. His books include *Ordinary* and the *Christ-Centered Exposition* commentary on the Book of Exodus, among others. He is happily married to Kimberly, and they have five adopted children.

**Ali Claxton** adapted this material for use with small groups.

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*, a gospel-centered small-group study that dives deep into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives participants to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. *The Gospel Project* provides you with tools and resources to purposefully study God's Word and to grow in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another. Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this resource:

**GATHER A GROUP.** We grow in the faith best in community with other believers, as we love, encourage, correct, and challenge one another. The life of a disciple of Christ was never meant to be lived alone, in isolation.

**PRAY.** Pray regularly for your group members.

**PREPARE.** This resource includes the Bible study content, three devotionals, and discussion questions for each session. Work through the session and devotionals in preparation for each group session. Take notes and record your own questions. Also consider the follow-up questions so you are ready to participate in and add to the discussion, bringing up your own notes and questions where appropriate.

**RESOURCE YOURSELF.** Make good use of the additional resources available on the Web at [www.gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://www.gospelproject.com/additionalresources) and search for this specific title. Download a podcast. Read a blog post. Be intentional about learning from others in the faith. For tips on how to better lead groups or additional ideas for leading this Bible study, visit: [www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject](http://www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject).

**GROUP TIME.** Gather together with your group to discuss the session and devotional content. Work through the follow-up questions and your own questions. Discuss the material and the implications for the lives of believers and the mission to which we have been called.

**OVERFLOW.** Remember ... *The Gospel Project* is not just a Bible study. *We* are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the other people in your group.



SESSION 1

# THE REDEEMER RESPONDS

God is grieved by the sin, death, and power of hell that afflicts His world, and is sacrificially involved in the removal of all that destroys and alienates His world from Himself.<sup>1</sup>

**JOSHUA RYAN BUTLER**

## INDIVIDUAL STUDY

In the 1980s, a song titled “Walk Like an Egyptian” by the Bangles shot up the charts and led to people of all ages doing the lighthearted “sand dance.” Even today, people unfamiliar with the song know the dance. However, “Walk Like an Egyptian” doesn’t lead you to take Egypt very seriously. For many in the West, Egypt is known primarily for ancient pyramids or King Tut’s tomb. In the period of the exodus, however, people feared Egypt. Egypt had mighty pharaohs, great building projects, and they were in touch with dark power. Everyone took Egypt seriously. Israel was enslaved to the Egyptians, and it’s the awfulness of their slavery that sets the dark backdrop for God’s glorious deliverance that takes place.

**How do you think the enslavement of the Israelites might have affected their view of God’s covenant promise?**

In Genesis, we saw how Joseph, Jacob’s beloved son, was taken to Egypt because his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. After interpreting dreams, Joseph gained favor in the eyes of Pharaoh. Joseph ended up helping save lives by storing up food during the seven good years in preparation for a seven-year famine. So all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain (see Gen. 41:57). During this time, Joseph’s family went to Egypt and Joseph provided food for them (see Gen. 42). His family resettled in the Nile Delta. This family of 70 people entered Egypt (see Gen. 46), and from there, they multiplied greatly (see Ex. 1:1-7).

In Exodus 1:8, we read that a new king over Egypt dealt harshly with the Israelites. As a result, Joseph’s family was brought under political slavery (see Ex. 1:8-10), economic slavery (see Ex. 1:11-14), social slavery (see Ex. 1:15-22), and spiritual slavery (see Ex. 3:18; 4:22-23; 5:8). They needed to get out of Egypt.

*Exodus* means “a going out” or “departure.” This Book of the Bible provides the historical account of God’s deliverance of His people from Egypt’s cruel slavery. In this session, we see how God responds to Israel’s terrible plight by listening to the prayers of His oppressed people, revealing His character to Moses, and promising to deliver and redeem them. Watching God reveal Himself and His justice should inspire us to worship our Redeemer and pursue His mission in the world.

Throughout the week, engage these daily study sections on your own. Each of these examines different ways God responded to His people and revealed Himself as the Redeemer. There are three daily readings to prepare you before your group meets for this session. Interact with the Scriptures, and be ready to interact with your small group.

# 1 God Hears Our Prayers

In chapter 2 of the Book of Exodus, we read about Moses' birth (see 2:1-10), his growth (see 2:11-15), and his flight from Egypt (see 2:15-22). The story continues in verse 23 with a new king ruling Egypt. Despite this change in government, slavery remains intense. As a result, Israel groans and cries out for help.

<sup>23</sup> After a long time, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned because of their difficult labor, and they cried out; and their cry for help ascended to God because of the difficult labor. <sup>24</sup> So God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God saw the Israelites, and He took notice.

EXODUS 2:23-25

When the people cried out, God heard them. He also saw their oppression and took notice of the situation (see 2:24-25). God heard. God saw. God knew. His attentive nature is revealed throughout the Scriptures. God's people can cry out to their God and trust that He hears them and cares about their situation.

These cries were of particular interest to God because of His covenant with Abraham (see 2:24). The term *covenant* appears 27 times in Genesis and then again here in verse 24 for the first time in Exodus. God's purpose of redemption and mission given to Abraham in the Book of Genesis continues in the exodus story. God very much cares about His people.

**What does the word *covenant* mean to you? What are some examples of covenants you have made?**

Throughout chapter 3 we hear some of the same language, and we see the holy God to whom we pray. This time God told Moses that He had heard the groans of His people. God called Moses to serve as His agent of redemption and, in so doing, reminded Moses that He had heard Israel's prayers. As a result of this, God told Moses of His plan to free them.

In Exodus 3:1-6, we find the popular story of the burning bush and "the Angel of the LORD" who appeared to Moses. The fire represents God's holy presence. Fire appears later in Exodus and elsewhere in Scripture: a pillar of fire that led God's people (see Ex. 13:21-22); fire at Mount Sinai (see Ex. 19:18; 24:17); fire in the tabernacle (see Ex. 40:38; Num. 9:15-16); and fire on

the Day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:3). When God forbade idolatry later in Deuteronomy, Moses said, “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deut. 4:24). The author of Hebrews also used this language in describing how to worship (see Heb. 12:28). Fire is appropriate because we know that we are drawn to fire, amazed by fire, but we also have to tell children, “Don’t play with fire.” Fire must be taken seriously. And the holiness of God even more so.

God spoke to Moses and called him to take his sandals off as an act of reverence (see Ex. 3:5; Josh. 5:13-15). God then identified Himself with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see Ex. 3:6). Before God entered into a relationship with Moses, He had entered into a relationship with Moses’ fathers (see Ex. 2:24).

When Moses encountered God, the Scripture says Moses “hid his face” (Ex. 3:6). Why? Because Moses was in the presence of the Holy One. We should understand Moses’ fear. We should also maintain a sense of reverence before God. However, as believers, we don’t have to hide from God in terror because of the work of Christ. We are hidden in Him (see Col. 3:3)! Therefore, we can seek God with confidence because of the work of Christ.

**What is the difference between being “terrified” by God and being “awed” by God?**

In Exodus 3, verses 7-10, this holy God responds to the cries of the oppressed by revealing His plan to Moses. God’s motive appears in verses 7 and 9. God told Moses that He was aware of the people’s desperate situation. He said, “I have observed ... have heard ... I know about their sufferings ... [their] cry ... has come to Me ... I have also seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.” These phrases echo the words of 2:23-25 and show us that God does indeed hear our cries.

**How does knowing God hears the cries of the oppressed encourage you?**

**What are ways we can make sure our ears are open to injustice and oppression in our world so we can respond with good works?**

# 2

## God Reveals His Character

We've seen how God responds to injustice by hearing the prayers of the oppressed. He hears, He sees, and He acts. But part of His action is to reveal His character.

<sup>11</sup> Moses asked God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> He answered, "I will certainly be with you, and this will be the sign to you that I have sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain."<sup>13</sup> Then Moses asked God, "If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what should I tell them?" <sup>14</sup> God replied to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you."

<sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation."

EXODUS 3:11-15

Moses wasn't eager to go on mission. In this dialogue, Moses made several excuses for not obeying God's call. God responded to each of Moses' excuses and questions with statements about His own sovereignty and power.

This section is deeply encouraging. If you feel as though God is sending you to do something beyond yourself, the key is to take your eyes off of your failures and weaknesses. Get a vision of God. Moses too had to recognize that God is enough.

Moses' first argument was about himself. "Who am I?" he asked (3:11). He felt insufficient. He essentially asked, "Have you considered my resume? The last 40 years, I've been in a wilderness." Stop and think about it. Moses was a shepherd. While he used to be a prince, he was now a humble shepherd. God asked this shepherd to confront the most powerful person in the world and tell him to let his slaves go free. Moses didn't have great influence, but God responded to Moses by revealing what's most important—Himself. God said, "I will certainly be with you" (3:12). Throughout the Bible, this is what God's leaders need to lead—God's presence. It's the nonnegotiable for serving God. Think about Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, Jehoshaphat, and the disciples. God was with them all.

In addition to God's presence, God also promised a sign. He said, "You will all worship God at this mountain" (3:12). God intended to bring His people back to this mountain to sing His praises.

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What are some areas in which you feel unqualified or unable to do what God has called you to do?

How does God's presence and His promise enable you to go on?

Moses' next big question was "What shall I say?" He asked, "What is Your name?" (3:13). It's obviously important to know who God is, especially if you're going to tell a group of people that God sent you! Merely saying, "I heard a voice in a bush," wouldn't be very persuasive. So God told Moses His name (3:14-15). God revealed His name as "Yahweh" (commonly rendered as "LORD" in English) in verse 15. Great mystery exists here. No one really knows how to pronounce *Yahweh*, and the meaning is mysterious, but the meaning seems to be related to the idea of this verb "to be." In other words, "God is." He is central. He has no beginning. He causes everything to be. He alone is God.

Does it move you when you hear, "Tell them I AM sent you"? God was saying that He is absolutely central. Paul later said, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36). Is God central in your life? Is He central in your marriage? Is He central in your ministry? God told Moses that the most important thing about his mission was God Himself!

Behold, the greatness of your God. God is self-existent and self-sufficient. God needs no air, no sleep, and no food. He doesn't need us, but we need Him! God wasn't like the Egyptian false gods. He was and is the one true God on whom all things depend. God is also majestic in His mysteriousness. We'll never have God totally figured out. He doesn't involve us in His work because He needs us; He includes us because He loves us.

When we feel inadequate to obey God's call, what are some ways we can move our eyes from the task at hand to the majesty of God Himself?

# 3

## God Promises Redemption

God responds to the cries of His people by hearing their prayers, by revealing His character, and finally by promising redemption. God gave Moses a message to give to the elders of Israel. Notice God's sovereign prediction about what was going to happen:

<sup>16</sup> Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has appeared to me and said: I have paid close attention to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup> And I have promised you that I will bring you up from the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>18</sup> They will listen to what you say. Then you, along with the elders of Israel, must go to the king of Egypt and say to him: Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Now please let us go on a three-day trip into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God. <sup>19</sup> However, I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, unless he is forced by a strong hand. <sup>20</sup> I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles that I will perform in it. After that, he will let you go. <sup>21</sup> And I will give these people such favor in the sight of the Egyptians that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. <sup>22</sup> Each woman will ask her neighbor and any woman staying in her house for silver and gold jewelry, and clothing, and you will put them on your sons and daughters. So you will plunder the Egyptians.

### EXODUS 3:16-22

In this striking promise, Moses was learning what it means to be a prophet: to declare God's message and to trust in God to work in people's hearts. Consider how God told Moses that the elders "will listen to what you say" (3:18). This wasn't the last time God would promise Moses that people would respond to his message.

Notice also that Moses and the elders were going to say to Pharaoh: "Let us go on a three-day trip into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God" (3:18). We see here that Israel wasn't just enslaved physically, but they were enslaved spiritually too. They needed to be freed in order to worship (see 7:16; 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3).

It's unclear why they only asked for a "three-day" trip. It may have been an ancient Near Eastern expression to mean a long journey of an indefinite period of time. What was important about the trip, however, was the purpose—worship.

Even though the elders would listen to Moses' message, God reminded Moses that Pharaoh would not listen, at least not initially. God told Moses that in response to Pharaoh's refusal, He would intervene with His "strong hand" performing wonders (3:19-20).

Moses still wasn't convinced. In chapter 4, he argued with God. Moses complained that no one would believe his message (see 4:1-9). But God assured him that they would.

Then, in the most widely known excuse, Moses used his speech problem as a reason for not obeying God's plan (see 4:10-12). God told Moses that this excuse was irrelevant and irreverent. Concerning the latter, God said, "Who made the human mouth?" (4:11). God told Moses that He formed him for a purpose. God knew about Moses' weakness. And it was precisely because of this weakness that God would gain much glory.

God told Moses that his excuse was irrelevant: "I will help you speak and I will teach you what to say" (4:12; cf. Jer. 1:4-10). When Moses again expressed reluctance, God responded to him with anger (see 4:14), but He was gracious here as well. He gave Moses some help by sending Aaron with him (see 4:14-16).

God is looking for reporters, not orators. We do not have to make fine speeches; we just give the news. And just like Moses, we must also learn that "it's not about us!" It's about the I AM.

What are the fears that most hinder you from speaking on God's behalf?

How can we overcome these excuses with faith in God's promised redemption?



GROUP STUDY



Warm Up

As a group, consider the implications of what we've studied this week.

Think back to your time working through the first part of Exodus. What was the most meaningful or impactful part of the study this week?

How did God reveal His character to the Israelites in their suffering?

When have you experienced a painful season that made you wonder if God was listening to your prayers?

Looking back now, can you see evidence of God at work in your circumstances?

In Exodus, we see this beautiful reality unfold: God heard the cries of His people, responded by revealing His character, and promised redemption. His ultimate purpose was not merely to relocate the Israelites to a better place. He rescued them *from* something (slavery) *for* something (worship and witness). And that's exactly what has happened to us through Christ's work on our behalf. In Ephesians 2:1-10, Paul told the Ephesians that they had been saved (by grace through faith) from wrath and for good works. Paul also described this glorious transfer to the Colossians, saying:

<sup>13</sup> He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.

<sup>14</sup> We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, in Him.

COLOSSIANS 1:13-14

How can we show gratitude and glorify God in the midst of our deepest struggles?

## Discussion

[God] needs no one, but when faith is present He works through anyone.<sup>2</sup>

A. W. TOZER (1897-1963)

During this time you will have an opportunity to discuss what God revealed to you during the week. Listed below are some of the questions from your daily reading assignments. They will guide your small group discussion.

1. What does the word *covenant* mean to you? What are some examples of covenants you have made?
2. What is the difference between being “terrified” by God and being “awed” by God?
3. How does knowing God hears the cries of the oppressed encourage you?
4. What are ways we can make sure our ears are open to injustice and oppression in our world so we can respond with good works?
5. What are some areas in which you feel unqualified or unable to do what God has called you to do? How does God’s presence and His promise enable you to go on?
6. What are the fears that most hinder you from speaking on God’s behalf?
7. How can we overcome these excuses with faith in God’s promised redemption?

## Conclusion

The plan was in place! God responded by revealing His promise of redemption to the reluctant shepherd-mediator, Moses. And here we look forward through the Scriptures to Jesus, the great I AM who gave us an even greater revelation of God's goodness and righteousness. He is the Good Shepherd who would lay down His life for His sheep in order to lead us out of a greater slavery into a greater freedom—from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light.

As the people of God's kingdom, we are formed by God's deliverance. In this story, we see how God promised deliverance from socio-political-physical-economic slavery and from spiritual slavery. Christians should care about alleviating both types of human suffering: temporal suffering and especially eternal suffering. Let's do both in the power of our self-sufficient, prayer-hearing God.

### **Spend some time praying this for you and for your group:**

“God, thank You for hearing the cries of Your people and rescuing us in our helpless state. As we praise You for Your goodness, stir in our hearts a deep desire to take Your message of redemption to this lost and hurting world. Amen.”

1. Joshua Ryan Butler, *The Skeletons in God's Closet* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 15.
2. A. W. Tozer, quoted in *1001 Quotations That Connect*, eds. Craig Brian Larson and Brian Lowery (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), Quotation 495.
3. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 275-76.

