

GLORY

Discovering the *Awesome* God

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GLORY: DISCOVERING THE AWESOME GOD

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INTRODUCTION

FEW PEOPLE IN HISTORY have ever experienced blessings that are as profound and far-reaching as those that Abraham experienced. God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation, that He would give them the land of Israel as an eternal inheritance, and that all nations would be blessed through Abraham's family line.

Fast-forward hundreds of years. God kept His promise! From a slow start with Abraham's son, Isaac, the family had become a great nation. However, not all was sunshine and roses.

Abraham's descendants were living in Egypt instead of the land God had promised to them. They were slaves, not free. And many had forgotten the God of their ancestors. The situation was so bad that Moses himself asked God who he should say had sent him. In other words, "What is Your name?" Moses had to learn Who God was and help God's people understand Who He was.

That brings us to the most important question for anyone today: do you know the one true God? In this study, we will learn how God reacquainted His people with His character. In the process, we will also gain a new perspective of the God of Abraham—the God Who always was and forever will be the great I Am.

LESSON 1

THE GOD WHO IS SOVEREIGN

Exodus 1:8–22

MANY OF US HAVE HAD A FAVORITE TV SHOW during a particular stretch of our lives. You probably know how it is—you keep watching reruns of the show, and it's hard to stop! The more you watch, the more you learn about the characters in it. After a while, it's like you know the characters on a personal level. It almost feels as if you could walk over to a character's house, knock on the door, and be invited in for coffee. But that didn't happen during the first episode. It developed as you became immersed in the show.

In real life and with our significant relationships, it takes time to get to know someone and learn what that person is like. It takes even longer to predict how someone will respond and behave in certain situations. The better you know a trustworthy person, the better equipped you are to trust that person. Our relationship with God is no different.

1. Who are some of your favorite characters from a TV show or book? How long did it take to thoroughly enjoy those characters?
2. Think of someone in your life. Give examples of how your trust increased or decreased as you got to know that person better.
3. Write several truths about God that are comforting.

Where Is God?

Life is full of unexpected difficulties. Earthquakes cause untold numbers of deaths in Haiti; in the case of the 2010 quake, the total climbed to hundreds of thousands. Conflicts erupt around the globe and shake our sense of security. A building tragically collapses in Florida. And it seems as if we are always waiting for the next mass shooting. Amid these events, people may question God's character and even His existence.

4. In the privacy of your own heart, consider whether calamitous events in the world have caused you to question God. If so, what are they?

5. Have personal circumstances caused you to question God, and if so, what are they?

Many people would admit that God has an ultimate plan that cannot be thwarted. I suspect, however, that some of us have seen or experienced things that could make us question the goodness of God's plan. I'll go a step further. Sometimes the circumstances in our lives may even seem contrary or counterproductive to God's plan. After getting slammed by one of life's circumstances, we might slowly pull ourselves off the ground, wipe the blood from our faces, look to God and exclaim (reverently or not so reverently), "How could that event possibly fit into Your plan? How could something so terrible have any positive contribution to Your work in my life?" Some might even ask, "Where is God?"

The beginning of Exodus paints a bleak picture for the people of Israel. A family of seventy people had landed in Egypt, avoiding certain starvation due to a drought. They never intended to stay in Egypt. God had promised this family—the eventual nation of Israel—that He would give them land. They held tightly to that promise.

6. Read Genesis 50:24 and 25. What was Joseph's prediction and request?

7. Joseph's statement, "God will surely visit you," is a way of saying "God will come to your aid." What was Joseph implying about their future situation with these words?

We can imagine Joseph's family watching carefully for the next several years, fully expecting God to bring them out of Egypt. Little did they know that God wasn't going to act until far beyond their lifetimes. When Exodus 1 picks up the story, they had been in Egypt for around four hundred years and had become slaves.

You can almost hear the people of Israel saying, "How could a loving God allow this terrible turn of events to take place? Why has the God of our fathers, the God Who promised His abiding faithfulness to our ancestors, allowed us to be in bondage?"

After the passing of many generations, I'm sure most of Abraham's descendants had completely lost hope. By this time very few even knew the promises, let alone believed them. Many seem to have forgotten about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God not only needed to rescue His people, but He also had to show His people Who He was. He had to show them His glory. They needed to see what He was like in His majesty, goodness, and greatness.

Moses wrote Exodus from the vantage point of freedom. The Israelites had been freed from slavery and were looking back on these events. Masterfully Moses painted the dark shroud of hopelessness surrounding the Children of Israel during their years of slavery. At the same time, he pierced the shroud with a bright glimmer of light—God's imperceptible movement to fulfill His promises. God is always trustworthy, no matter what circumstances we may face. This passage shows how God used circumstances to accomplish His will for the people of Israel.

8. Read Exodus 1:6–22 and share with the group your observations of the text.

The Sovereign God Uses Unexpected Means

God used ferocious growth

Relocating a group of seventy people would have been challenging. But at the point of Exodus 1, the number had grown to around two million! The rapid growth of the nation of Israel was enough to make Pharaoh feel threatened and take steps to be sure Israel didn't cause trouble.

Two million required rapid, supernatural growth. God was fulfilling His plan to make Abraham a great nation, while the people themselves didn't seem to realize it was happening. The text has grammatical indicators that reveal the occurrence of something miraculous. In the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, when something

needed to be emphasized, a word or synonyms of a word were often repeated several times. In these verses, the concept of the people multiplying is repeated seven times.

This was not only amazing, but it also posed a problem for both Pharaoh and Israel. One might even say that God's ways seemed to contradict His will. His will was to move His people to the land of Israel. However, by most estimates, transplanting two million people across the desert is impossible. There is little food or water in a desert.

But God had a plan. He would simultaneously fulfill His promises while showing the people His character and power.

9. Recall a time in your life when you thought you knew what God wanted, but the path God used seemed contradictory to His will.

10. What did you learn about God through this process?

God used a frightened country

A new Pharaoh had come to town, we learn in verse 8. This was not only a new Pharaoh, he also "did not know Joseph." And his administration wasn't planning to honor the understanding that a previous government had had with Joseph's family.

11. In the US, when a new president is elected, the media watches the president's first hundred days very closely. Why is that?

Fascinating political dynamics swept through Moses' world. The new pharaoh who started the oppression may have been reacting to the Hyksos, foreigners who violently took over the country and ruled for many years. Thus he would have wanted to return the country to her national roots. Others believe the new pharaoh was himself part of the Hyksos. In that case, the prospect of revolt would have always been fresh on the new pharaoh's mind. Either way, the situation spelled trouble for the Israelites.

This pharaoh used fear as leverage so he could manipulate the people under his rule. It's interesting that he said, "Let us deal shrewdly" with the people of Israel (v. 10). What was the outcome of this directive? He isolated the people, made them into

slaves, and treated them with terrible cruelty. A look back through history to the early 1940s reveals similar tactics. Times may change, but the sinful human heart stays the same.

For those Israelites who remembered God and worshiped Him, this must have been very confusing. How could these events possibly be the best way for God to accomplish His will and move His people toward the Promised Land?

One reason is this: God knew the best way to reach the hearts of His people. For God to reveal Himself, He needed them to know they needed rescuing. As difficult as the Egyptian bondage was, it put them in a position where God could reveal His glory.

God used a fearless defiance

12. Reread verses 12–21. What stands out as most significant to you?

13. How did God keep turning what looked bleak into something that was accomplishing His will?

The pharaoh of Egypt tried to outsmart everybody, but in the process, he became outsmarted. Verse 12 says the Israelites were multiplying and filling the land; they were threatening to take over! Instead of stifling the birth rate, the oppression by Pharaoh led to the opposite. Even when life seemed to be growing worse for the people of Israel, the Bible shows us that God was ultimately winning this battle.

Pharaoh moved on to plan B. Tragically, this plan meant infanticide. He met with two midwives named Shiphrah and Puah and gave them a terrible command. They were to kill all Israelite baby boys shortly after delivery. But note the astonishing statement in verse 17. The midwives defied the command of one of the most powerful rulers on the planet because they feared God. They preferred to obey God rather than Pharaoh. In doing so, they were committing an offense punishable by death.

Verse 19 records the answer Shiphrah and Puah gave to Pharaoh: the Hebrew women were strong and full of life, so much so that they didn't need midwives. The Hebrew women were capable, and before the nurses even arrived, they had given birth. Think about this excuse for a minute! God certainly had to be guiding these events for Pharaoh to believe a story like this. And God commended the midwives'

faith (v. 21). Even as life around them was going from bad to worse, Shiphrah and Puah decided to trust God. They did so in the face of incredible risk.

God used a fiendish command

So far, everything that had occurred seemed to indicate that God's plan had been thwarted. But then the situation became worse. Pharaoh moved on to plan C. He called on his own people to participate in the genocide of the Hebrews. Read verse 22 and think about what it means. Statements like this hurt our ears and assault our sensibilities, and rightly so. How could God still be working during such tragedy?

Consider how the text has provided distinct markers that show us God's ultimate control. First, Pharaoh attempted to be smart in how he dealt with the Israelites. His plan was not flawed from a human standpoint, but he was trumped and outsmarted by God, Who was masterfully orchestrating history. Next came the cruel and harsh oppression of the Hebrews for the purpose of squelching their growth, but it fostered more growth. Then Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to commit infanticide, but in direct defiance to Pharaoh, they let the babies live. Finally Pharaoh asked his people to murder babies. But his plan resulted in the birth and safekeeping of Israel's future deliverer. We'll learn more about that in lesson 2.

When God Doesn't Seem to Be There

Why do God's ways sometimes seem to contradict or at least be counterintuitive to His will? Why does God work in this way? These questions are not unique to us. "Where are you, God?" is a refrain in Job and of many of the psalms. God's people throughout history have struggled at times with His apparent disinterest in their personal affairs. So how do we come to grips with this paradox?

14. Read verses 15–22 again. Note who is mentioned by name. Why is this significant?

15. What can we learn from the Hebrew midwives?

Shiphrah's and Puah's names are mentioned because these women had the right perspective. They may not have understood what was happening. They may not have completely grasped God's promises to their forefathers. They may have struggled to

come to grips with it all, yet they feared and trusted God. That's why their names are recorded for all time in the Word of God.

We need the faith of Shiphrah and Puah. No matter how much it seems that things are spinning out of control, we must have a simple reverence for God and a trust in Him like these two women showed. And we must keep traveling on the journey of understanding Who God is.

As you seek for a way to trust when times are difficult, remember that God often designs these times to reveal Himself to you. Maybe you don't know much about God at all, or maybe you've known God for a long time. It seems that many of the Israelites had forgotten Who He was. They needed to be brought up to speed. Be assured that God is trustworthy, as we have seen in this passage. He always keeps His promises; and that is true even when the fulfillment of those promises doesn't seem possible.

16. As this lesson concludes and we look forward to the following lessons, what do you hope to discover about God through this study?

Memorize: Romans 8:28

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You have always existed. You have always been God, and You always will be God. Thank You for creating us to know You and love You. Thank You for so graciously making Yourself known to us. We pray that You would help us to know that You are always working, even when it seems as if Your ways contradict Your will. Use all the circumstances in our lives and our world to show us more about Yourself.