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LifeChange
S E R I E S

A NavPress Bible study on the book of
EXODUS

NAVPRESS 

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book;
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides;
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible;
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole;
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take 60 to 90 minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give

obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and Details

The study begins with an overview of the book of Exodus. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson one you will lay the foundation for your study of Exodus by asking yourself, “Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?”

In lessons two through seventeen you will analyze successive passages of Exodus in detail.

In lesson eighteen you will review Exodus, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of Questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise of knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray, “Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember.

Study Aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 163. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture Versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as The Living Bible is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and Meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you, and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For Group Study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for

members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board (preformed shower wallboard works well), so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Pages 165-166 list some good sources of counsel for leading group studies. The *Small Group Letter*, published by NavPress, is unique, offering insights from experienced leaders every other month.

LESSON ONE

OVERVIEW

To read the Bible with understanding requires that we see both the "forest" and the "trees," the larger context and the small details. We will begin and conclude our study of Exodus by looking at the book as a whole. Once you have a broad grasp of its contents, you will be more able to comprehend its parts. (You may want to just skim some of chapters 25-40.)

First impressions

1. Read Exodus through, at one sitting if possible. Jot answers to question 2 as you read. Use the map on page 18 to find the places mentioned.

Study Skill—Your Most Important Research Tool

Bible study aids, like this guide, are abundant as never before. We can easily overlook or take for granted what is our most important tool, next to a reliable translation of Scripture, for the study of God's Word: an open, inquisitive, and reverent mind.

As you study any portion of the Bible, there is a danger in letting what you have previously thought or heard influence your thinking. It is certainly not necessary to assume that none of your previous knowledge is reliable. However, be careful to let the text speak to you in a fresh way and challenge any misconceptions you have about its meaning. Don't be afraid to ask new questions, or even old ones—old questions sometimes cry out for new answers.

Finally, only as you approach the Scriptures with the conviction that they are the Word of God will the Holy Spirit be able to impress their truth upon you. The goal of any study of the Bible should be to know its divine Author and better understand how to glorify Him through your life. May your study of Exodus help you meet these objectives.

2. For each of the following portions of the book, list the principle persons, places, and main events or contents.

Chapters 1-4 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 5-12 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 13-18 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 19-24 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 25-31 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 32-34 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

Chapters 35-40 (persons) _____

(places) _____

(events/contents) _____

3. From this list, what persons, places, events, and themes would you say are the focus of the book?

persons _____

places _____

events _____

themes _____

4. What contrasts do you find between the beginning and end of the book?

5. What characteristics of God does Exodus emphasize?

6. After one reading, how would you summarize the portrait of man (the Egyptians, the Israelites, Moses) that the book presents?

Study Skill—Themes and Purposes

The most important purpose of an overview is to make some initial decisions on what the book is about. You will refine your views with deeper study, but it is enormously helpful to have something to start with. In discerning the author's message, look for themes and purposes.

A *theme* is a main topic that recurs through the book, such as "repentance" or "deliverance" or "holiness." Clues to themes are 1) ways things change between the beginning and the end, and 2) conflict or contrast between individuals or groups.

A *purpose* is the motive the author seems to have had for writing the book, such as "to help Israel understand its relationship to God."

7. Summarize the message of Exodus in one or two sentences. (What is it about? What themes run through it? What seems to be the Holy Spirit's chief aim in giving this book to Israel or the Church?)

Now that you've had a chance to form your own impressions of Exodus, here is some background you might find helpful.

The birth of a nation

In the book of Genesis, God began His strategy to restore mankind to intimacy with Him by focusing on a single family: the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Exodus, the next stage of the story, documents four fundamental transformations in this family:

1. numerical growth, as Israel multiplied from a clan of seventy to a nation of some two million people;
2. geographical movement from Egypt to Sinai;
3. theological development, as Israel exchanged the natural spontaneity of its worship for a structure the Lord Himself revealed; and
4. social and spiritual maturation, from human slavery to divine service.

As momentous as these changes were, they took place not over decades or years, but within months, weeks, and even hours. In a single night, God not only liberated, but also enriched, His people (Exodus 12:29-36). Even more, He accomplished all four revolutions in spite of human indifference and opposition.

In recounting Israel's transformation, Exodus never idealizes its charac-

ters. It challenges our comfortable theological generalizations. God's people grow suspicious of the very one He used to free them from slavery; they turn to serve idols *after* they have left Egypt far behind. The lines between the "world" and the "church" (to use our terminology) pass, not between nations or groups, but rather through the souls of individual men and women. Not only Pharaoh, but Israel also hardens its heart against the Lord (Exodus 4:1, 17:1-7; Psalm 95:7-11). Yet at the same time, the Lord defies our modern individualism by dealing with a whole nation as one.

In stark contrast to Israel's conduct, Exodus sets before us Moses. Amidst the confusion, unbelief, and even rebellion of God's people, this man grows to a maturity, authority, and intimacy with God that challenges us to imitate him. In fact, Moses often foreshadows what Christ will be centuries later. He is first God's instrument in delivering Israel, then the mediator between God and Israel. Yet the story does not attempt to hide Moses' failings.

In Exodus, God lays a foundation for Israel's relationship to Him. He reveals His name and its meaning: His character, attributes, and mighty deeds of redemption. He declares His Law that sets the terms of His covenant with Israel under a new administration. Those terms tell how God's people will treat and worship Him, and outline the ethical principles for how a holy people will treat each other. Redemption from slavery, ethics between men, and worship of God are the three great themes of the book, as God explains to Israel, "Who is the Lord, and how shall we relate to Him?" We can break the book into three large sections:

- I. Divine Deliverance—Israel created and liberated (1:1-15:21).
- II. Divine Decrees—Israel's devotion created and channeled (12:1-13:16; 15:22-24:18).
- III. Divine Dwelling—a sanctuary for God's glory in Israel's midst, designed and created (25:1-40:38).

Author and title

Many modern scholars have abandoned the ancient tradition that Moses or someone close to him wrote the bulk of Exodus as a factual historical record. They believe that Exodus is the product of several centuries of experience and reflection, and multiple editings and relaborations. However, both Exodus and other passages of Scripture say that Moses wrote at least parts of the book (Exodus 17:14, 24:4, 34:27; Joshua 8:31; Mark 7:10, 12:26; Luke 2:22-23). Furthermore, everywhere in the Old Testament we find references to Moses, the judgments on Egypt, Israel's exodus, and the revelation of the Law through Moses. The Hebrews knew what happened, so we would be foolish to treat Exodus as fiction.¹

Exodus is a Latin word derived from the Greek word *exodos*, which means "exit" or "departure" (see Luke 9:31, Hebrews 11:22). When the Jews translated the book into Greek around 200 AD, they named it *Exodos*. The Hebrew name comes from the book's first two words, *we'elleh shemoth* ("These are the names of"). The same phrase occurs in Genesis 46:8. In both

places, it introduces a list of those "who went to Egypt with Jacob" (Exodus 1:1). This repetition shows that Exodus was not meant to be a separate book, but continued a narrative that began in Genesis and extended through Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These five books are known as the Pentateuch ("five-volumed book") or the Torah ("law" or "teaching").

Application

Study Skill—Application

Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture . . . is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Paul also writes, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4), and "These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us" (1 Corinthians 10:11). Therefore, when you study Exodus, you should keep asking yourself, "What difference should this passage make in my life? How should it make me want to think or act? How does it encourage, warn, correct, or set me an example?"

Application will require time, thought, prayer, and perhaps even discussion with another person. Sometimes it is more productive to concentrate on one specific application, giving it careful thought and prayer, than to list several potential applications without really reflecting on them or committing yourself to them. At other times, you may want to list many implications that a passage has for your life. Then you can choose one or two of these to act or meditate upon.

8. What passages, events, or persons in Exodus seem especially significant to you?

9. In your first reading, did you find any truths that are relevant to your life? If so, was there anything you would like to commit to memory, pray about, or act on? If so, write down your plans.

10. Was there anything in the book that bothered you or that you did not understand? Write your questions here, and plan to pursue answers in one of the books listed on page 163, from another Christian whose biblical knowledge you trust, or from your study group.

For the group

This “For the group” section and the ones in later lessons are intended to suggest ways of structuring your discussions. Feel free to select what suits your group. The main goals of this lesson are to get to know the book of Exodus as a whole and the people with whom you are going to study it. If you have never done a LIFECHANGE study before, you might want to take one meeting to do the “warm-up” below and discuss the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5-8, and a second meeting to discuss lesson one. This will also give the group more time to read all of Exodus and answer the questions in lesson one.

Worship. Some groups like to begin with prayer and/or singing. Some share requests for prayer at the beginning but leave the actual prayer until after the study. Others prefer just to chat and have refreshments for a while, then open the study with a brief prayer for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and leave worship and prayer until the end.

Warm-up. The beginning of a new study is a good time to lay a foundation for honest sharing of ideas, to get comfortable with each other, and to encourage a sense of common purpose. One way to establish common ground is to talk about what each person hopes to get out of your study of Exodus, and out of any prayer, singing, sharing, outreach, or anything else you might do together. You can also share what you hope to give as well as get. If you have someone write down each member’s hopes and expectations, then you can look back at these goals later to see if they are being met. Goal setting at the beginning can also help you avoid confusion when one person thinks the main point of the group is to learn the Scripture, while another thinks it is to support each other in daily Christian life, and another thinks prayer or outreach is the chief business.

How to Use This Study. Advise group members to read the “How to Use This Study” section on pages 5-8 if they have not already done so. You might go over important points that you think the group should especially notice. For example, point out the optional questions in the margins. These are available as group discussion questions, ideas for application, and suggestions for further study. It is unlikely that anyone will have the time or desire to answer all the optional questions and do all the applications. A person might do one “Optional Application” for any given lesson. You might choose one or two “For Thought and Discussion” questions for your group discussion, or

you might spend all your time on the numbered questions. If someone wants to write answers to the optional questions, suggest that he use a separate notebook. It will also be helpful for discussion notes, prayer requests, answers to prayers, application plans, and so on. Invite everyone to ask questions about the “How to Use This Study” section.

Overview. Ideally, everyone should have read the whole book of Exodus and the background on pages 13-15 before you meet together. However, some may not have done so, and others may not retain much of what they read quickly. Encourage any group members who found the overview to be a lot of work; it is by far the most time-consuming lesson of the study.

Begin by asking for everyone’s overall impressions of Exodus. Did you enjoy the book? Was it dull or exciting? Which parts did you find the most fun or the most edifying? Which parts seemed to be less relevant to your lives?

You might use a chalkboard to jot the group’s answers to question 2. Circle people, places, events, and themes that seem most important in tying the book together (question 3). Then discuss questions 4 through 7.

Next, ask someone to tell briefly how the story of Exodus relates to what happens in Genesis. Then, have someone else quickly link Exodus to what happens in the rest of the Old Testament. Finally, what does Exodus have to do with the events of the New Testament? If the group has trouble with any of these questions, a Bible handbook, commentary on Exodus, or Old Testament survey will give answers. Ask a group member or the leader to come next time with this information.

Let everyone share questions he or she has about the book. Save these to answer as you study in detail, and come back to them at the end to see if you have answered all of them.

Don’t spend a lot of time on application in this lesson. Later lessons will attempt to guide those who are unsure how to apply Scripture to their lives. However, do share any ways you were able to identify with the characters and incidents in the story, and any ways you found the book relevant to your lives. Questions 9 and 10 should help you get to know each other better and give everyone something to think about during the week.

Wrap-up. Briefly tell the group what to expect in lesson two. Whet everyone’s appetite, and ask the group to think about any optional questions that you plan to discuss.

Worship. Many groups like to end with singing and/or prayer. This can include songs or prayers that respond to what you’ve learned in Bible study, or prayers for specific needs of group members. Some people are shy about sharing personal needs or praying aloud in groups, especially before they know the other people well. If this is true of your group, then a song and/or some silent prayer and a short closing prayer spoken by the leader might be an appropriate ending.

1. For a detailed discussion of authorship and date of composition, see any of the commentaries on page 163, or see W.S. LaSor, D.A. Hubbard, and F.W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982).

From Egypt to Sinai

