

EXODUS 19-40

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THE SHADOW OF GLORY



7 INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDIES FOR
SMALL GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS



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The Shadow of Glory

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» HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THESE STUDIES

1. What is an Interactive Bible Study?

Interactive Bible Studies are a bit like a guided tour of a famous city. They take you through a particular part of the Bible, helping you to know where to start, pointing out things along the way, suggesting avenues for further exploration, and making sure that you know how to get home. Like any good tour, the real purpose is to allow you to go exploring for yourself—to dive in, have a good look around, and discover for yourself the riches that God's word has in store.

In other words, these studies aim to provide stimulation and input and point you in the right direction, while leaving you to do plenty of the exploration and discovery yourself.

We hope that these studies will stimulate lots of 'interaction'—interaction with the Bible, with the things we've written, with your own current thoughts and attitudes, with other people as you discuss them, and with God as you talk to him about it all.

2. The format

Each study contains five main components:

- short sections of text that introduce, inform, summarize and challenge
- a set of numbered study questions that help you examine the passage and think through its meaning
- side-bars that provide extra bits of background or optional extra study ideas, especially regarding other relevant parts of the Bible
- an ‘Implications’ section that helps you think about what this passage means for you and your life today
- suggestions for thanksgiving and prayer as you close.

3. How to use these studies on your own

- Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to what he is saying in the Bible, and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it.
- Work through the study, reading the text, answering the questions about the Bible passage, and exploring the side-bars as you have time.
- Resist the temptation to skip over the ‘Implications’ and ‘Give thanks and pray’ sections at the end. It is important that we not only hear and understand God’s word, but respond to it. These closing sections help us do that.
- Take what opportunities you can to talk to others about what you’ve learnt.

4. How to use these studies in a small group

- Much of the above applies to group study as well. The studies are suitable for structured Bible study or cell groups, as well as for more informal pairs and triplets. Get together with a friend or friends and work through them at your own pace; use them as the basis for regular Bible study with your spouse. You don’t need the formal structure of a ‘group’ to gain maximum benefit.

- For small groups, it is *very useful* if group members can work through the study themselves *before* the group meets. The group discussion can take place comfortably in an hour (depending on how sidetracked you get!) if all the members have done some work in advance.
- The role of the group leader is to direct the course of the discussion and to try to draw the threads together at the end. This will mean a little extra preparation—underlining the sections of text to emphasize and read out loud, working out which questions are worth concentrating on, and being sure of the main thrust of the study. Leaders will also probably want to work out approximately how long they'd like to spend on each part.
- If your group members usually don't work through the study in advance, it's extra important that the leader prepares which parts to concentrate on, and which parts to glide past more quickly. In particular, the leader will need to select which of the 'Implications' to focus on.
- We haven't included an 'answer guide' to the questions in the studies. This is a deliberate move. We want to give you a guided tour of the Bible, not a lecture. There is more than enough in the text we have written and the questions we have asked to point you in what we think is the right direction. The rest is up to you.

5. Bible translation

Previous studies in our Interactive Bible Study series have assumed that most readers would be using the New International Version of the Bible. However, since the release of the English Standard Version in 2001, many have switched to the ESV for study purposes. For this reason, we have decided to quote from and refer to the ESV text, which we recommend.

» STUDY 1

BIRTH OF A NATION

[EXODUS 19]

A pivotal moment

IMAGINE THAT YOU WERE asked to pick the ten most significant moments or Bible passages in the history of God's people in the Old and New Testaments. What would they be?

Surely Genesis 1-3 would be in, because of its story of God the Creator and of humanity's bid for independence from him. Another would have to be God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12, and the covenant that God makes with him in Genesis 15 and 17. You would almost certainly include the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, and you would not want to overlook the description of the sins of the kings and people of Israel and Judah in 2 Kings 17. But close to the top of your list, possibly inside the top three, would have to be Exodus 19-20, which we are now about to turn to. These chapters are pivotal both in the book of Exodus and within the Bible as a whole, because they look back on what has happened between God and his people, and they describe how their relationship will be shaped in the future.

Before we look at these chapters, it will be helpful to review just what has happened within Exodus to this point.

Which comes first: grace or law?

From this point on in the book of Exodus, much emphasis is given to laws and regulations of various sorts. One danger in reading these laws out of context is that we also get them out of perspective. We need to keep reminding ourselves that God's grace—his undeserved generosity—comes before God's law. So God *graciously* chose Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) and formed a covenant with him. Then God *graciously* heard his people's cry for help and remembered his covenant

(Exod 2:23-25). Then he *graciously* stretched out his hand to save his people. *All of this grace* preceded his giving of the law to Israel, and his calling on them to obey it. We mustn't let this focus on grace slip out of our minds as we spend our time examining God's law. It will help us understand what law is.

Covenants

Today the word 'covenant' is a legal expression, meaning a 'contract'. It has a legal dimension in the Bible too, but we should note that, fundamentally, 'covenant' language is the language of relationship. It conveys the idea of commitment in relationship, often involving mutual obligations and promises by one or both sides of the relationship. While there are covenants between individuals and nations described in the Old Testament, the majority of the references are to God's covenant with people. Already in the Old Testament, we've seen the covenant with Noah (Gen 9) and Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 17). It appears that the covenant referred to in verse 5 is seen as a development or continuation of the covenant with Abraham (cf. Exod 2:23-25).

The previous book, Genesis, finished with the people of God in Egypt. They were relatively small in number but were safe and secure under the leadership and protection of Joseph. By the beginning of Exodus, they had greatly increased in number but were slaves under the fierce oppression of an antagonistic Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Under his oppression they cried out to God (Exod 2:23-25). God heard them and rescued them through a series of plagues. Despite the spectacular nature of this deliverance, the people quickly forgot God's generosity, and spent their time grumbling and complaining on their way to Mt Sinai (Exod 15:22-18:27).

Now, three months after the exodus from Egypt, at the point where we pick up the story, they have arrived at the foot of Mt Sinai (Exod 19:1-2). They will stay there for about a year—that is, until Numbers 10:11-12.

Read Exodus 19:1-6.

These verses record God's foundational statements about how he understands his **covenant** (19:5) with Israel.

1. Who took the initiative in this covenant (v. 4)?
2. How did he show his initiative (v. 4)?

3. What response does God require to his initiative (v. 5)?

4. In response to Israel's response, what does God promise he will do for them (v. 6)?

5. Who else will benefit from all of this (v. 6)? (Hint: a priest is a mediator or a go-between; whom are they mediating between?)

Thinking about priests

PRIESTS HAVE A NUMBER OF characteristics and roles in the Old Testament. They are set apart as devoted to God (Lev 21). They are to declare God's will to people (e.g. Lev 10:10-11; Deut 33:8-11;

Jer 18:18; Hos 4:6), and to pray for people and offer sacrifices for them (Lev 9, 16). The whole world is God's, and Israel is to do these things for the people of his world (Gen 12:3; Deut 4:5-8).

Read Exodus 19:7-25.

6. How do God's people respond to his outline of the covenant (vv. 7-8)?

7. In this passage God promises to reveal himself.

a. Why does he make the promise to reveal himself?

b. Why do you think this might be important (v. 9)?

8. From God's instructions and his revelation of himself in verses 10-25, write down two or three words that summarize what you learn about God's nature.

9. If you had been present among the people at the base of Mt Sinai on that day, describe how you might have felt.

Thinking things through biblically

ONE OF THE STRIKING THINGS ABOUT this passage is the readiness of God's people to embrace the covenant and to pledge, "All that the LORD¹ has spoken we will do". The fickleness of Israel in the wilderness already leads us to wonder about their confidence. Their subsequent history, especially the incident of the golden calf in chapter 32, will demonstrate that they are overconfident. In Joshua 24:19, Joshua will be far more pessimistic. There the people will sound just as confident as God's people here, but Joshua will reply to them with these words: "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God". So this leaves us with two problems. Given Israel's impending failure, who will fulfil the charter outlined for Israel here? And how can Israel have a future as God's people?

Fortunately, the Bible does not leave us with these terrifying questions unaddressed. First, it tells us that Jesus was able to do what Israel could not do. He was the ideal Son of God who was obedient to God and therefore functioned as a light to the nations (Luke 2:32; cf. Isa 42:6, 49:6, 51:4). Second, he was the means by whom God would deal with sin, so that it would not be remembered and human hearts would be transformed (e.g. Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:16-36). We know from the New Testament that God did this through the death of Jesus and the work of his Spirit (Rom 3:21-31, 8:1-17).

The point is that because humans are made of the same stuff as Adam and Eve, there is no hope for humanity if left on its own. Thankfully, God does not leave us on our own!

» Implications

Read 1 Peter 2:9-12.

- This passage describes the role of Christians in the world. How is the language similar to that of Exodus 19:3-6?

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- According to this passage, what function do Christians have in the world?

 - How is our function similar to that of Old Testament Israel in the world? How is it different?

 - How well is your particular expression of the people of God (church, Bible study, etc.) fulfilling your God-ordained role, as described in this passage?

» Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for what he accomplished through Jesus in:
 - fulfilling the task that Israel failed to achieve
 - achieving forgiveness, the changing of human hearts, and the sending of the Spirit by his obedience to God.
- Pray that we will be effective, as God's people in his world, in our priestly role of declaring his great deeds and living godly lives among those who don't know him.

Endnote

1. In most English translations of the Bible, the word 'LORD' in capital letters means God's personal name, 'Yahweh' or 'I am who I am' (or possibly 'I will be who I will be'; see Exodus 3:13-14). We will follow this convention, where relevant, in these studies.