

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: Israel Enslaved and a Deliverer Born

Exodus 1:1–2:25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this opening section establishes the bedrock of the whole book: God keeps His covenant. The explosive growth of Israel in 1:7 is not an accident of demographics but the visible keeping of the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15. When the chapter closes with God hearing, remembering, seeing, and knowing (2:24–25), the teacher should help the class feel the weight of covenant faithfulness. Deliverance has not yet arrived, and the deliverer is a fugitive shepherd, yet the foundation is already laid in the character of God. Guard the class against reading Pharaoh's cruelty as evidence that God had abandoned His people; the text insists the opposite.

Watch two pastoral edges. First, the midwives raise the question of obedience to authority. Affirm that human authority is real and God-given, but it is not absolute; when a ruler commands what God forbids, the believer must obey God (Acts 5:29). Second, Moses' failed rescue in 2:11–15 is a chance to distinguish zeal from presumption. Moses had the right cause and the wrong method and timing. This is not a license to excuse passivity, but a caution against running ahead of God.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims at the formation of the student. Most of your class members are living in the unspectacular middle of their own stories, in seasons that feel hidden and slow, where God seems silent and no rescue is in view. This passage was written to teach them that the silence is not absence. The same God who was quietly arranging midwives, a basket, a princess, and a desert was never once surprised or absent. Help your students leave not merely informed about Exodus 1 and 2, but steadier in their trust that God sees them and has not forgotten.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 1:6–7. The text deliberately echoes God's words to Adam and to Noah, that Israel was fruitful, increased greatly, and filled the land. What does this growth reveal about God keeping the promise He made to Abraham (Genesis 15:5), even while Israel is far from the promised land and unaware of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by anchoring the class in the link back to Genesis. The opening verses list the sons of Israel who came to Egypt, then 1:7 piles up verbs: fruitful, increased abundantly, multiplied, grew

exceedingly mighty, the land filled with them. This is covenant language. God told Abraham his offspring would be like the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea (Genesis 15:5; 22:17). Israel does not yet hold the promised land, and as slaves they may have felt the promise was failing, yet right here the promise is visibly advancing.

Stress that God's promises advance on God's timetable, often invisibly. The Israelites multiplying in Goshen had no idea they were living inside the fulfillment of a centuries-old word. This is the doctrine of providence: God working steadily through ordinary events to keep His word. It should steady believers who cannot yet see how God is keeping His promises to them.

Connect forward to Christ. Every promise of God finds its yes in Him (2 Corinthians 1:20). The faithfulness God shows to Abraham's seed here is the same faithfulness that guarantees our hope in the gospel. Teach this without binding Old Covenant specifics on the class; the point is the unchanging character of the promise-keeping God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's covenant faithfulness to Abraham as the foundation of the entire book of Exodus (Genesis 15:5; Exodus 2:24).
- The doctrine of providence: God advancing His purposes through ordinary events without spectacular signs.
- All God's promises finding their yes and fulfillment in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20), so His past faithfulness grounds our present hope.
- The danger of concluding that God has failed simply because we cannot yet see the fulfillment.

Discussion Prompts

- How does seeing Israel's growth as a kept promise change the way we read the suffering that follows?
- Where have you later realized God was keeping a promise during a season you thought He was absent?
- Why is God's character, rather than our circumstances, the right place to anchor hope?

Question 2

Student Question:

The Israelites multiplied during years of relative ease and then faced bitter slavery. Think about your own walk with God. How do seasons of comfort and seasons of hardship each tend to shape your faith, and which one is shaping you right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and it asks the student to read his own spiritual life honestly. Israel grew numerous in years of welcome and then was refined in the furnace of slavery. Both seasons were under God's hand.

Help students see that comfort and hardship each carry a spiritual danger and a spiritual gift. Comfort can grow our numbers and our blessings but can also lull us into forgetting our dependence on God. Hardship can feel like abandonment but often deepens roots that ease never could.

Land this warmly and personally. Invite students to name, at least silently, which season they are in right now, and to ask what God may be growing in them through it. Avoid letting anyone conclude that hardship means God is angry or absent; the rest of the lesson disproves that.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereign use of both prosperity and adversity to shape His people (Deuteronomy 8:2–3).
- The particular spiritual temptations of comfort, including forgetfulness and self-reliance.
- The refining purpose of hardship for those who belong to God (Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4).
- Honest self-examination as a healthy spiritual practice.

Discussion Prompts

- What does comfort tend to do to your prayer life, and what does hardship tend to do to it?
- Which season are you in right now, and what might God be growing in you through it?
- How can the church help one another stay dependent on God in good times?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 1:15–21. The midwives feared God rather than Pharaoh and refused to kill the babies. What does their example teach about the limits of human authority and about obeying God when a human command contradicts His will (compare Acts 5:29)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, are a striking study in the fear of God. Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth, commands them to murder, and they simply will not. The text says they feared God, and so they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them.

Teach the biblical principle of obedience to authority and its limits. Scripture commands honor and submission to governing authorities (Romans 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:13–17), but that submission is never absolute. When a human command would require disobeying God, the believer must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29; Daniel 3; Daniel 6). The midwives model exactly this.

Note God's response: He dealt well with the midwives and gave them families of their own. God remembers and honors quiet, costly faithfulness. Also note the dignity God gives them. He records the names of two Hebrew servant women and leaves the mighty Pharaoh anonymous, a quiet reversal that tells us whom God truly esteems.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of God as the proper foundation for courage in the face of human threat (Proverbs 29:25).
- Submission to governing authority as a real but limited duty (Romans 13:1-7).
- The clear command to obey God rather than men when the two conflict (Acts 5:29).
- God honoring and remembering faithful obedience, even from the obscure and powerless.

Discussion Prompts

- How do we tell the difference between rightful submission to authority and sinful complicity?
- What makes the fear of God a source of courage rather than fear?
- Why might God have chosen to record the midwives' names and not Pharaoh's?

Question 4

Student Question:

Shiphrah and Puah did the right thing quietly, at real risk, when no one powerful was watching. Where is God asking you to do a quiet, costly right thing that no one may ever notice or applaud?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the midwives' example onto the student. Their obedience was quiet, hidden, and dangerous. No crowd cheered; the powerful would have punished them if discovered. Yet God saw.

Press gently on the difference between public and hidden obedience. Much of the Christian life is lived where no one is watching, in choices about honesty, purity, words spoken about others, and small refusals to go along with wrong. Faithfulness in the unseen is the real test of character.

Encourage students that God's notice is enough. The midwives did not act for reward, yet God rewarded them. We obey not to be seen by others but because we fear and love God, who sees in secret (Matthew 6:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integrity in hidden choices as the true measure of character (Luke 16:10).

- Acting from the fear of God rather than the desire for human approval (Galatians 1:10).
- God's notice of what is done in secret (Matthew 6:4).
- Courage to refuse wrong even at personal cost.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to do wrong because no one is watching?
- What quiet, costly right thing might God be asking of you this week?
- How does believing that God sees change the way you act in private?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 2:1–10. Moses' mother placed him in an ark of bulrushes on the very river meant to drown him. How do you see God's unseen providence at work in the details here, arranging a princess, a sister, and even paying the true mother to nurse her own son?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The birth and rescue of Moses is a masterclass in God's hidden providence. Notice the layers: a mother's faith, a basket of bulrushes (the same Hebrew word used for Noah's ark), a watching sister, a princess moved with compassion, and an arrangement by which Moses' own mother is paid to nurse her son.

God's name is never mentioned in these verses, yet His fingerprints are everywhere. This is how God most often works, not in a parted sea but in the timing of a bath, the boldness of a young girl, the softening of a heart. Help the class develop eyes to see providence in the ordinary.

Draw out the irony that Pharaoh's own household raises and funds the very deliverer who will undo Pharaoh. God is not frantically reacting to evil; He is quietly weaving it into His purposes (compare Genesis 50:20). The deliverer of Israel grows up safe inside the house of the one who decreed his death.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The doctrine of providence: God governing every detail to accomplish His will (Proverbs 16:9; 21:1).
- God working His purposes through, and even against, the schemes of the wicked (Genesis 50:20).
- The dignity and power of faithful, ordinary human action within God's plan.
- Learning to discern God's unseen hand in everyday circumstances.

Discussion Prompts

- Which detail of Moses' rescue most clearly shows God's hidden hand, and why?

- Where have you only later recognized God's providence arranging the details of your life?
- How can we grow eyes to see God at work in ordinary events?

Question 6

Student Question:

Moses' mother had to let go of her son, trusting him to God and to the current of a dangerous river. What is something you are gripping tightly right now that God may be asking you to release into His care?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the theme of releasing what we love into God's hands. Moses' mother could not keep her son and could not bear to kill him, so she entrusted him to God by way of a basket on the Nile. Hebrews 11:23 names this as an act of faith.

Invite honest reflection on what students are gripping tightly: a child, a relationship, a career, a fear about the future, a reputation. Clinging often comes from a quiet belief that we can keep something safer than God can.

Be tender here. Releasing something to God is not the same as carelessness or fatalism; Moses' mother did everything she wisely could and then trusted God with the rest. Help students hold both: do the faithful thing, then release the outcome to the God who sees.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faith expressed as entrusting what we love to God (Hebrews 11:23; 1 Peter 5:7).
- The difference between anxious clinging and faithful stewardship.
- Casting our cares on God because He cares for us.
- Trusting God's care as greater than our own ability to protect.

Discussion Prompts

- What are you gripping tightly right now out of fear?
- What would it look like, practically, to release that into God's care this week?
- How is trusting God different from simply giving up or being passive?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 2:11–15. Moses tried to deliver his people his own way, by his own hand and on his own timing, and it ended in a dead Egyptian and forty years in the desert. What does this teach about the difference between zeal for God's cause and doing God's work in God's way?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses' attempt to rescue his people in 2:11–15 is a sober lesson in doing the right cause the wrong way. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, looks both ways, and kills the man. Stephen tells us Moses supposed his brothers would understand that God was giving them deliverance through him (Acts 7:25), but they did not, and the deed sent him fleeing for forty years.

Distinguish carefully between zeal and presumption. Moses' burden for his people was right; his method, violence by his own hand and on his own timing, was not. God did intend Moses to deliver Israel, but not like this and not yet. The same act done in God's way and time would later split a sea.

Apply this honestly without excusing passivity. The lesson is not that we should do nothing, but that we must do God's work in God's way, submitting our zeal to His wisdom and timing. Forty years in Midian were not wasted; they were the school in which a hot-headed prince became the meekest man on earth (Numbers 12:3).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between godly zeal and self-directed presumption (Romans 10:2).
- Doing God's work in God's way and timing rather than our own.
- God's patience in preparing His servants through long, hidden seasons.
- The danger of running ahead of God even in a good cause.

Discussion Prompts

- How can a right desire still lead us into wrong action?
- Where are you tempted to force something good in your own strength and timing?
- What might God be teaching you in a season of waiting or delay?

Question 8

Student Question:

Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh's palace learning to be somebody, and forty years in the desert learning to be nobody. Where might God be using a slow, hidden, humbling season to prepare you for something you cannot yet see?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students into the value of hidden, humbling seasons. Moses spent forty years learning to be a somebody in Pharaoh's court and forty years learning to be a nobody in the desert, before God called him at the burning bush. The wilderness was not a detour; it was the curriculum.

Help the class see that God often prepares His servants in obscurity. David tended sheep, Paul went to Arabia, even Jesus spent thirty quiet years before three public ones. Our culture despises the slow and hidden, but God does His deepest shaping there.

Apply with hope. Many in your class feel stuck, overlooked, or stalled. Reframe that season as potential preparation. The point is not to romanticize hardship but to trust that no season under God's care is wasted (Romans 8:28).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's pattern of preparing His servants in hidden, humbling seasons.
- The formation of humility and dependence away from the spotlight.
- Trusting that no season is wasted in God's hands (Romans 8:28).
- Resisting the culture's contempt for the slow and unseen.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God so often prepare His servants in obscurity rather than the spotlight?
- What might God be forming in you during a slow or hidden season right now?
- How can the church honor faithfulness that the world overlooks?

Question 9

Student Question:

Read 2:23–25. Four times the text says God heard, God remembered, God saw, and God knew. Israel's deliverance had not yet come, yet everything turned on the fact that God had not forgotten His covenant. Why is the faithfulness of God to His covenant promises the true foundation of hope, both for Israel then and for us in Christ now (compare 2 Corinthians 1:20)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson. After Moses flees and a generation passes, the chapter closes with four verbs that carry the whole hope of the book: God heard their groaning, God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God saw the people of Israel, and God knew. No miracle has happened yet, but everything has changed, because the text turns our eyes to God's covenant faithfulness.

Teach what remembering means here. God had not forgotten and then suddenly recalled; in Scripture, for God to remember His covenant means to act on it, to move toward His people in keeping with His sworn promise. The deliverance that fills the rest of Exodus flows from this covenant, not from Israel's worthiness or strength.

Carry this all the way to Christ. The covenant with Abraham was always pointing forward; in Christ all God's promises are yes and amen (2 Corinthians 1:20), and the deliverance from Egypt foreshadows the greater deliverance from sin and death that Jesus accomplishes. Be careful here to keep the Old Covenant in its place: these were promises God kept to Israel under the law given through Moses, and their deepest fulfillment is in Christ and His church, not in any future earthly political program.

Guard the class from despair-driven thinking. Hope is not anchored in how circumstances look but in the unchanging faithfulness of the God who remembers His covenant. That is why this short paragraph, with no action in it at all, is one of the most important in the book.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Covenant faithfulness as the foundation of all biblical hope (Exodus 2:24; Psalm 105:8–10).
- What it means for God to remember: to act in keeping with His sworn promise.
- All God's promises fulfilled and guaranteed in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).
- The exodus as a real, historical deliverance that foreshadows the greater deliverance in Christ.
- Anchoring hope in God's character rather than in visible circumstances.
- Keeping the Abrahamic promise rightly placed: fulfilled in Christ and His church, not in a future earthly political restoration.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that God remembered His covenant, and why is that more than simply recalling a fact?
- How does anchoring hope in God's faithfulness, rather than in our circumstances, change the way we endure hard seasons?
- How does the deliverance from Egypt point us forward to the deliverance Jesus brings?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across these two chapters, from a groaning people to a hidden deliverer God was already preparing. Name one specific way this passage is teaching you to trust that God sees, remembers, and is at work in your life even when no rescue is yet in sight, and how Jesus, the greater Deliverer, makes that trust certain.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks the student to gather the whole lesson into one personal response. The arc has moved from a groaning, enslaved people to a hidden deliverer God was already preparing, all held together by a God who hears, remembers, sees, and knows.

Help students name a specific, concrete takeaway rather than a vague feeling. The goal is transformation, not just information: one area of life where they will choose to trust that God sees and has not forgotten them, even with no rescue yet in view.

Point them to Jesus as the certainty of that trust. Israel had a promise; we have its fulfillment. The God who remembered His covenant and sent Moses has remembered us in Christ, the

greater Deliverer, who leads us out of a deeper bondage. Close by inviting students to rest their hope there.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from information to personal transformation (James 1:22).
- Trusting God's unseen care in a specific, named area of life.
- Jesus as the greater Deliverer who makes our hope certain (Hebrews 3:1-6).
- The exodus pattern as assurance that God completes what He begins.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific area where you need to trust that God sees and remembers you?
- How does Jesus, the greater Deliverer, make that trust certain rather than wishful?
- What is one step of obedient trust you will take this week because of this passage?