

FROM THE DIRECTOR OF GLADIATOR

EXODUS

GODS AND KINGS



FILM DISCUSSION GUIDE

EXODUS

GODS AND KINGS

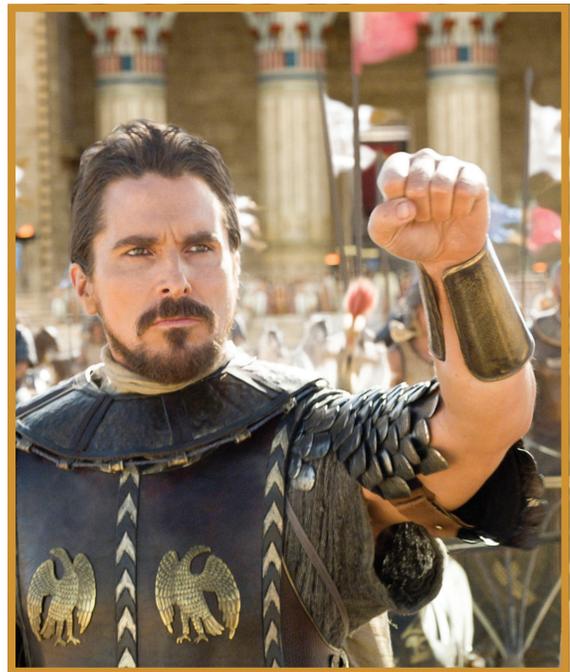
INTRODUCTION

“The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.”

Moses, Deuteronomy 18:15

With Passover and Easter approaching, how appropriate to screen and study the epic story of Moses in *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. Christian Bale stars as Moses, leader of the Israelites, engaged in an epic battle with the Egyptian Pharaoh, Ramses, played by Joel Edgerton. This sumptuous film is rooted in the biblical book of Exodus, which recounts the central events in Old Testament redemptive history: how God fulfilled his promises to his people. The annual celebrations of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are times of remembering God’s faithfulness, how Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land. Jesus was observing Passover when he blessed the bread and the wine for his disciples at the Last Supper. Only in retrospect, did Jesus’ followers come to understand the significance of sacrificial blood and the breaking of bread.

This study guide prepared especially for *Exodus: Gods and Kings* identifies enduring passages from the Bible to enlighten key scenes from the movie. Each section includes a Bible verse, a selection from the Old Testament, a passage from the New Testament, a clip from the film, and discussion questions to consider. It is appropriate for small group Bible studies, for sermon starters and for individual devotions. In studying the life of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, we find inspiring parallels to the life of Christ. In Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses foresees the Lord raising up a prophet from amongst the Israelites. In looking back at Moses, we catch a foretaste of the transformative power of Jesus’ life to come.



I. SAVE THE CHILDREN

“Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people:
‘Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile,
but let every girl live.’”

Exodus 1:22

READ: *Exodus 1:8–2:10*

Moses and Jesus were both born under the threat of death. The Hebrews’ sons were sentenced to death under two oppressive regimes, the Egyptians and the Romans. Moses and Jesus’ background as threatened outsiders influenced their subsequent leadership in significant ways.

The Egyptian Pharaoh was constantly monitoring the number of Hebrews serving as slaves, building cities like Pithom and Ramses. If the Israelites became too numerous, then conceivably they could lead or join a rebellion against the Egyptians. So, his death sentence for Jewish children was designed to keep things under control.

Moses was born into this oppressive and threatening environment. Only resourceful actions by his mother and a fortuitous discovery by Pharaoh’s daughter saved the baby Moses’ life. He was subsequently raised amidst affluence in Pharaoh’s house. In the movie, *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, Jewish elders led by Nun (played by Ben Kingsley) offer Moses some much-needed historical background: Moses is the son of a slave. Such shocking news may not be readily embraced.

WATCH: *Moses and the Elders’ Secret Meeting, Chapter 6*

Moses understandably bristles at this surprising news. It is tough to embrace roots that seem far removed from our experience. Yet, Jesus also shared Moses’ fugitive status. He was born at a time when Herod, the Roman governor in Israel, tried to eradicate any threats to his power.

READ: *Matthew 2:1-18*

With the arrival of a baby, who could undermine his power, Herod takes out his anger upon all the Israelites. He orders the slaughter of innocents, sending a wave of grief and mourning across the mothers of Israel, like “Rachel, weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (Matthew 2:18). Thankfully, an angel of the Lord appeared to Jesus’ father, Joseph, in a dream. He responds to God’s prompting to get up and escape to Egypt with Jesus and his mother, Mary. They live in exile until the threat of death from Herod subsides.

Moses and Jesus both understand what it is like to be threatened, to be oppressed, to live in fear. They will become remarkable liberators of subjugated people.

DISCUSS:

When have you felt like an outsider under threat? What kind of special solidarity does God have with the innocent, the helpless, the enslaved?



III. THE PASSOVER

“And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ Then the people bowed down and worshiped.”

Exodus 12:26-27

READ: Exodus 12:21-28

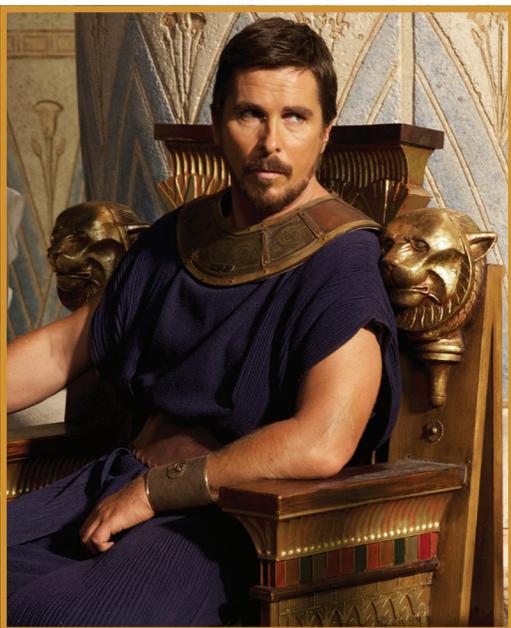
Contemporary society seems far removed from the time of ritual sacrifices, when the blood of a lamb could serve as a protective sign over a family home. Yet, after nine plagues failed to soften Pharaoh’s heart and free the Hebrews, God raised the specter that haunted the ancient world—threats to their eldest sons. The Egyptians would know the pain and loss that the Hebrews felt when their children were slaughtered. Perhaps, this kind of national tragedy would finally loosen Pharaoh’s iron grip on the Hebrew slaves. Their freedom would be secured through a horrific bloodletting. Only the blood of a lamb spread over a doorpost would cause this dramatic tenth plague to pass overhead.

The gravity of the threat to Egypt weighs heavily upon Moses’ heart in this scene from *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. Will Pharaoh take his warning seriously?

WATCH: Preparing for the Passover, Chapter 28

Moses’ call to slaughter a lamb is met with some fear and trepidation. His statement, “Pity the lambs, if I am wrong. If I am right, we will bless them for eternity” turns out to be remarkably apt. Passover became the key remembrance of how God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. *Pesach* or Passover begins with the *seder*, the holiest ritual feast on the Jewish calendar. It commemorates this central event in Hebrew history.

The sacrificial blood of a lamb comes to dominate Christian thought as well. In the Gospel of John 1:29, John the Baptist identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” The pouring out of Jesus’ blood on the cross becomes a ritual sacrifice to cover all sins and atrocities in human history. Rather than a one-time pass over, it becomes a permanent shield against the judgment of God our transgressions deserve. We are covered by Jesus’ blood.



READ: Matthew 26:17-29

Christians’ communion ceremony is rooted in the Jewish Passover celebration. As Moses led the Hebrews to remember their liberation from Egypt, so Jesus paused with his disciples for a Passover *seder*. At the time, no one could have imagined this would be their last supper together. The bread and wine that Jesus blessed at Passover became the primary elements of the Eucharistic meal. The blood of Jesus was remembered in the wine and the breaking of the bread subsequently snapped Christians back to Christ’s broken body on the cross. A Passover meal celebrating release for Hebrew captives became to the first Christians a commemoration of our collective liberation from sin.

DISCUSS:

What does the bread and wine of communion mean to you? Can you recall a particular time when it was especially resonant and meaningful?

IV. THE EXODUS

“Then Moses said to the people,
‘Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,
because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand.’”

Exodus 13:3

READ: Exodus 13:3-19

Contemporary society seems far removed from the time of ritual sacrifices, when the blood of a lamb could serve as protection. Have you ever eaten matzah, the flat, crispy bread that arrives in stores each spring? What does this thin kosher bread commemorate within the Jewish tradition?

Confronted by the death of his son, Pharaoh allows the Hebrews to go to Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. After years in slavery, they are essentially rushed out into the streets. They have no time to prepare meals for their journey. So unleavened bread that doesn't have time to rise becomes a symbol of the haste with which they fled Egypt. The weeklong feast of unleavened bread approximates the exodus out of Egypt when the Hebrews packed light for a very long journey.

Imagine the surprise and joy that the Israelites experience as they begin their exodus. This scene from *Exodus: Gods and Kings* captures their new-found feeling of freedom. The departure out of Egypt has echoes of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem centuries later.

WATCH: The Exodus Begins, Chapter 31

The euphoria that begins the journey soon fades. As Moses and the Israelites approach the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army approaches in hot pursuit. Will this be a disaster for the Hebrews, even worse than suffering in Egypt? Once again, God intervenes on behalf of his people.

What about provisions for their trek across the desert? God provides their daily bread in the form of manna. In Exodus 16:4, “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.’” Israel must come to trust in God as provider. This will be a hard lesson to learn.

READ: John 6:1-59

In the Gospel of John, Jesus demonstrates that he also can provide. As the Jewish Passover festival approached, his following had grown to almost 5000 people. How to feed so many? Jesus collects five loaves of bread and two fish from amongst the crowd and after blessing these provisions, baskets full of food are eventually left over. As God fed Moses and the Hebrews during the Exodus, so Jesus feeds the masses along the Sea of Galilee.

When the crowd asks Jesus for a sign comparable to the manna God provided in the wilderness, Jesus leans in with an analogy, declaring, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35). He doesn't shy away from comparisons to Moses and his remarkable leadership. Instead, Jesus ties himself to the Exodus tradition, making clear connections between the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the new era beginning with his life, death, and resurrection to come.

DISCUSS:

When have you been in need? How has God provided? What do you seek this Easter?

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CONCLUSION

Exodus: Gods and Kings offers a fresh retelling of the timeless story of Moses. It captures the grandeur of ancient Egypt and the endurance of the Hebrew people. It shows how Moses matured in his understanding of his calling and led the Israelites towards the Promised Land. *Exodus* explores his transformative moments on Mount Sinai from God's appearance in the burning bush to the reception of the Ten Commandments.

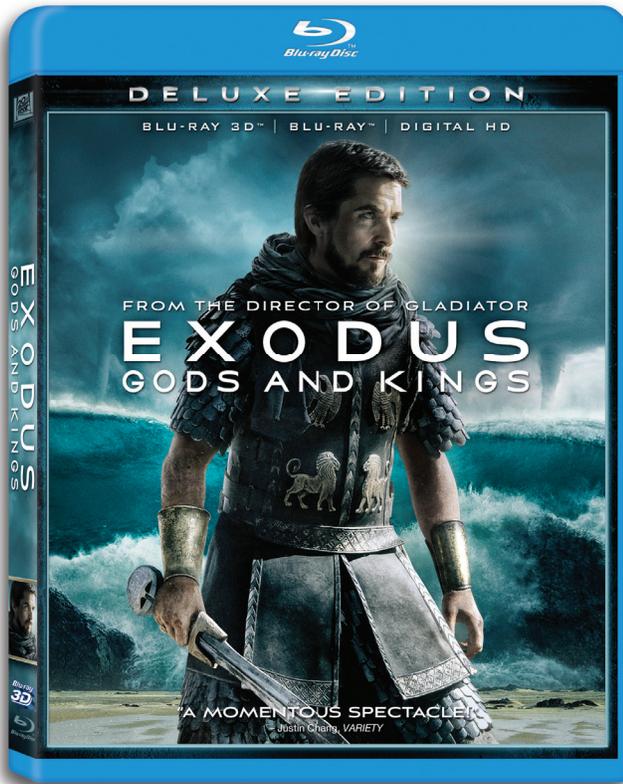
This timely Passover story provides an opportunity for Christians to reconsider the Easter story. We can rediscover the roots from where our faith arose. Hebrews 3:1-6 affirms how faithful Moses was as a servant in God's house, bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. Yet, it ultimately challenges us to fix our thoughts on Jesus as our apostle and high priest.

Like Moses, Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him. Hebrews 3:3 notes how, "Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself." As Jesus' ongoing house and project, we are encouraged to "hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory." May the God who led his people out of Egypt continue to lead and guide us towards the promised land of heaven this Easter season.



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ABOUT THE FILM



From one of cinema's most acclaimed directors, Academy Award® Nominee Ridley Scott* (*Gladiator*, *Prometheus*), comes yet another remarkable filmmaking achievement – *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. The celebrated all-star cast of this sweeping epic includes Oscar® Winner Christian Bale** (*American Hustle*, *The Dark Knight Rises*) as Moses, leader of the Israelites, Joel Edgerton (*The Great Gatsby*, *Zero Dark Thirty*) as his nemesis, Ramses, Ben Kingsley as Nun, and Sigourney Weaver as Tuya. Featuring compelling performances, state-of-the-art effects and breathtaking 3D, the film is a spectacular presentation of one of the Bible's most extraordinary books.

* Directing: 2001, *Black Hawk Down*; 2000, *Gladiator*; 1991, *Thelma & Louise*.

**Actor, *The Fighter*, 2010.



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Craig Detweiler, PhD is Professor of Communication and Director of the Center for Entertainment, Media, and Culture. His latest book is *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives*.



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